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#59
October
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COVER FEATURE

SKY PIRATES OF CALENDO

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THE DRIVING FORCE

By Ian Shires

October is my favourite month. Not my favourite season (that's summer), but the whole Halloween build-up has always been "my thing". Maybe because my birthday is on the 28th, and now, in my adult life, my daughter's birthday actually falls on the 31st. Maybe I just like monsters. Regardless, this is the October issue of SP! And I couldn't be happier with what we have in the following pages for you.

Not that everything is going completely according to plan. At the time of this writing, I have not heard from Daniel Horn since he turned in his Littluns article last month. Louise had lined up two articles about Zombie conventions, one pulled out at the last minute, and if the other does make it in, it's going to be practically at the eleventh hour. I've been trying to get our review staff rolling on track, but the results look like, right now, I was the only one to review anything. Might get some in last minute there, as well.

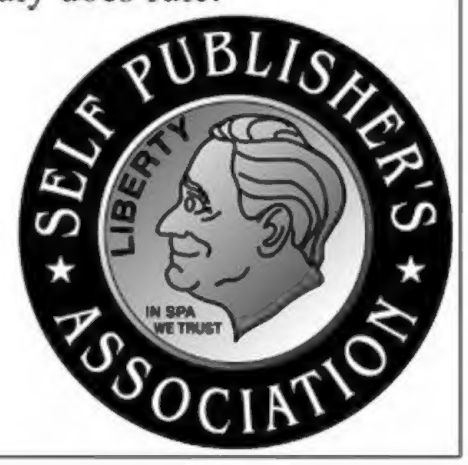
Even our cover feature ran into some stumbles which led to my taking over the article/interview at the last minute.

That's not to say that we don't have plenty of cool stuff. I'll let it speak for itself in the contents box. What the situation this month illustrates, however, is the need for MORE. More writers, more reviewers, more interaction and involvement from the community at large—with what this magazine is supposed to be about and doing.

I wrote recently in our weekly newsletter, that I had some changes coming up. The first main thing, starting this issue, is that all of the articles in this issue will now have a COMMENTS page attached to them, so that with a click in the PDF, you can get taken directly to a web page that shows the article and allows you to talk about it. This closer integration with the website will be also added to the site navigation, as each person's articles are then posted in a place where fans of the writer can see what else they have written about or who they've interviewed, etc. I feel strongly that in recent years, the "social media" has really had the opposite effect on us all. We all have our circles, but we have lost hold of the sense that we're all in this together. We're not all pulling for the same goal: a marketplace where anyone doing solid, interesting work, can find their audience and make a living doing what they love to do.

A long time ago, when this magazine was running under a different name, I put a call out to everyone to come together and forge a new kind of group, the Small Press Association (which later became the Self Publisher Association, or SPA). We did a lot of things that rode the waves of change, perhaps helped to cause some of it. I think it is time to once again ring that bell, and see who answers the call. The network needs you: your voice, your opinion. Only together can we build something truly worthwhile that will live past us, and show that Indie—truly does rule.

PDF? ——> Click!



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Sky Pirates really Soares!

An Article and Sneak Peek feature, interview by Ian Shires

For Everett Soares, 2007 seems like a lifetime ago. When the game-changing year began, all he had in the way of comic book credentials was an idea depicted in eight pages of art, a logo, and a passion to achieve a life-long dream – to be a published comic book writer. Then in March of 2007, *Sky Pirates*, eventually renamed *Sky Pirates of Valendor* was born. The opportunity came via a worldwide competition called Small Press Idol. Soares didn't win that competition, but came pretty close. From his perspective, he blew the competition away—because he was able to walk away from the competition with both a stronger product and a confidence in the quality of his concept.

Five years, later, *Sky Pirates of Valendor* is approaching the completion of its second volume. Published in story arc format, Volume 1 hit shelves nationwide via Diamond Distributors in October 2010. In February 2011, Everett Soares' newly formed Jolly Rogue Studios and launched Volume 2 with a whole purpose. After using the third-party publisher, Free Lunch Comics, for three years, Soares has made the leap to self-publishing. And now, as Issue 6 is on its way to shelves and convention tables across Northeast America, the studio and its creator are preparing for the next leg of their journey.

Sky Pirates of Valendor is a steampunk fantasy comic book series that revolves around the airship, *The Rogue's Revenge* and its crew. Led by Captain Tobin Manheim, main characters include Tobin's ex-wife and cyborg Gearz, Shyni, an assassin and the captain's current love interest, and First Officer Bryan Springhammer, the bear wielding the huge shotgun. The world of Valendor is comprised of sky islands, each with independent socio-economic, political and religious differences. However, when you have islands, you have ships. And when you have ships, you have pirates.

In Volume 1, Governor Langford finds his back against the wall, when Melissa, one of his most valued employees, is kidnapped by a group of zealots from the Temple Khorii. Tobin Manheim is summoned by Governor Langford, where they discuss a job that sounds awfully appealing to Tobin. The only catch? Tobin is forced to work with his ex-wife, Gearz.

Starting on their mission, the crew of the *Rogue's Revenge* find themselves docked at the port of Croix. Tobin discovers the hazards of not keeping up with his guild dues, and what it means to anger a Minotaur. After clearing his debt with the Pirate Queen, Tobin realizes his best plans have a habit of going horribly wrong.

The engineers of the *Rogue's Revenge*, Mister Fritz and Mister Tim,

help with the escape plan by blowing out the Khorii airship's engines. After a quick exit, our heroes find themselves limping away on a damaged ship. With the way blocked by an angry mob of minotaurs, Tobin risks his life in a personal duel.

After the crew of the *Rogue's Revenge*'s harrowing adventure, they find themselves with some downtime. They've delivered the healer as promised. They've run the blockade, and even found time to wreck the Governor's house. Some ghosts from Shyni's past come back to cause problems. Bryan destroys his hammer and Tobin outsmarts the Temple Khorii. And that's what they consider a slow day?

At the top of Volume 2, Gearz and Bryan decide to oversee the repairs to the '*Revenge*, while Tobin and Shyni work out their problems over a somewhat friendly drink. After another devastating collision with the Governor's mansion and a skirmish with his long-lost father, Tobin is issued a double assignment. How to handle them both in the time allotted? Divide and conquer, of course. And this is where Volume 2 takes off—in two opposite directions. Issue 2.6, which will make its debut at Rhode Island Comic Con on November 3 and 4, wraps up the series, similar to Volume 1—with massive property damage. Readers can also capture a copy via the series' website www.skypiratesofvalendor.com.

Now, some may ask, "Is this the end of *Sky Pirates of Valendor*?" and from the entire crew at Jolly Rogue Studios comes a resounding "Hell No!" In July of this year, via an IndieGoGo campaign, Soares announced the plot for Volume 3.

Off the coast of Gray Holt, a hurricane is brewing. In the eye of this hurricane is a stranded Khorii airship called *The Hand of Might*. You may be asking yourselves why this ship is so important. Well, the scuttlebutt is that it's the Temple Khorii's newest warship. That is, Khorii's newest tax ship. It holds the combined taxes and tribute for Terus Major and Terus Minor—and before you ask, that is a lot of gold. So much gold that you could use it to take control of the Pirate Guild.

The downside of this scuttlebutt is that it makes its way into a lot of ears—the wrong ears. Those ears belong to some of the most villainous, deranged and darkest pirates Valendor has ever known. However, one set of ears belongs to the only pirate motivated by revenge, as opposed to greed. That is Tobin Manheim of the *Rogue's Revenge*.

There are many obstacles that Tobin Mannheim must face to achieve his goal. The storm is only the beginning; soon he finds himself in the depths of full out pirate wars!

(Continued on page 5)

Sky Pirates of Valendor, Volume 3: Pirate Wars begins March 2014. Look closely—you may see a familiar face or two!

SP! Had the chance to catch up with Everett for a quick interview…

- -

SP!: Publishing yourself is a lot different from having a publisher. As you forge out on your own, do you find there are a lot of new things you are learning?

Everett: I feel that there are a ton of things I have learned and still need to learn. This is such a flexible industry that you need to keep your nose to the ground to find out what is new; whether it's a new print shop, a trick to use in your storyline, or a shading style that you can use to catch the eye of your reader. I've learned that self-publishing is great, because of the control you have over your own idea. I can control not only the story and its pacing, but the look of the book. I can explore new ideas on how to present the story to the reader. In a future storyline, our crew is going to find their way to a sky island where gravity is wacky, and we get to explore different ways to show off how this affects the characters. It's a great way to use the world's environment as a plot point.

SP!: Sky Pirates is certainly an epic-level story. Do you have it planned out all the way to the end, or is there still a good amount of wiggle room in where you are going? In other words, do you get feedback from fans and add things in?

Everett: Wow, I haven't heard epic-level being used with my story in a long time! What I normally do is that I have a timeline, where I have plotted out major fixed points in Valendor's history. From there, I connect the events to the characters. That way, if I need to change certain facts or settings, I can do so, while keeping the major events as signposts to keep heading in the right direction.

Fan input is very much welcomed at my table. I love to hear from fans. Trust me, I need to hear if I missed a plot hole here or there; it helps me keep the story honest and on track. It's also a great time to be a reader of our book, with Pirate Wars coming in Volume 3. We've created the opportunity to be a part of the story with our fundraising campaign, and we've had some great success with it. Six lucky readers have signed on to become pirate captains and create their own pirate ships. Each will even star in their own short story, to be featured in each issue of Volume 3. We have other fans naming ships and even serving as casualties. Yes, people signed up to get killed by a member of our crew.

SP!: Having seen this project from pitch idea, to first issues, to TPB editions, I've been impressed that it lends itself to the potential of other media. Do you think Sky Pirates *may someday grace the small or big screen?*

Everett: If I'm going to dream, I'm going to dream big! I would love to see this hit the big screen as an EPIC-level three-part movie event. However, when it all boils down to reality, I would be happy to be a Saturday morning cartoon with sponsorship from Honey Coated Sugar Bombs. All the elements are there and characters are growing and becoming the dark heroes they should become; all I need to do is to keep writing and hope that someone in Hollywood takes notice. Hey, it happened to *Men in Black*; it can happen to anyone.

SP!: I want to thank you for doing this. It means a lot to me when I see projects that went through Small Press Idol, not just still kicking, but kicking ass. I wish you and your wife, well.

Everett: Thanks for having us and thank you for this chance to share our work with your readers. There is so much more ass we need to kick before this is done, and with the help of my great wife, Sue Soares, we'll get there.

Please enjoy a Sneak Peek of Sky Pirates #6 in the coming pages. While this issue is not yet available, you can get an idea of what is coming, and if you like it, use the URL on the pages to go get yourself a copy of the Vol 2 TPB

For further discussion of this article, please go to:

http://www.selfpubmag.com/news/view/articles/sky-pirates-really.htm

SNEAK PEEK!

SKY PIRATES OF VALENDOR

This Preview brought to you by:

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Evertte Soares

Pencil Art by
Brian Brinlee

Inked Art by
Alex Rivera

Tones by
Jet Amago

Jolly Rougue Studios

Check it out at:
http://skypiratesofvalendor.com/spov/store/volume-2/

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The Comic Book Printers

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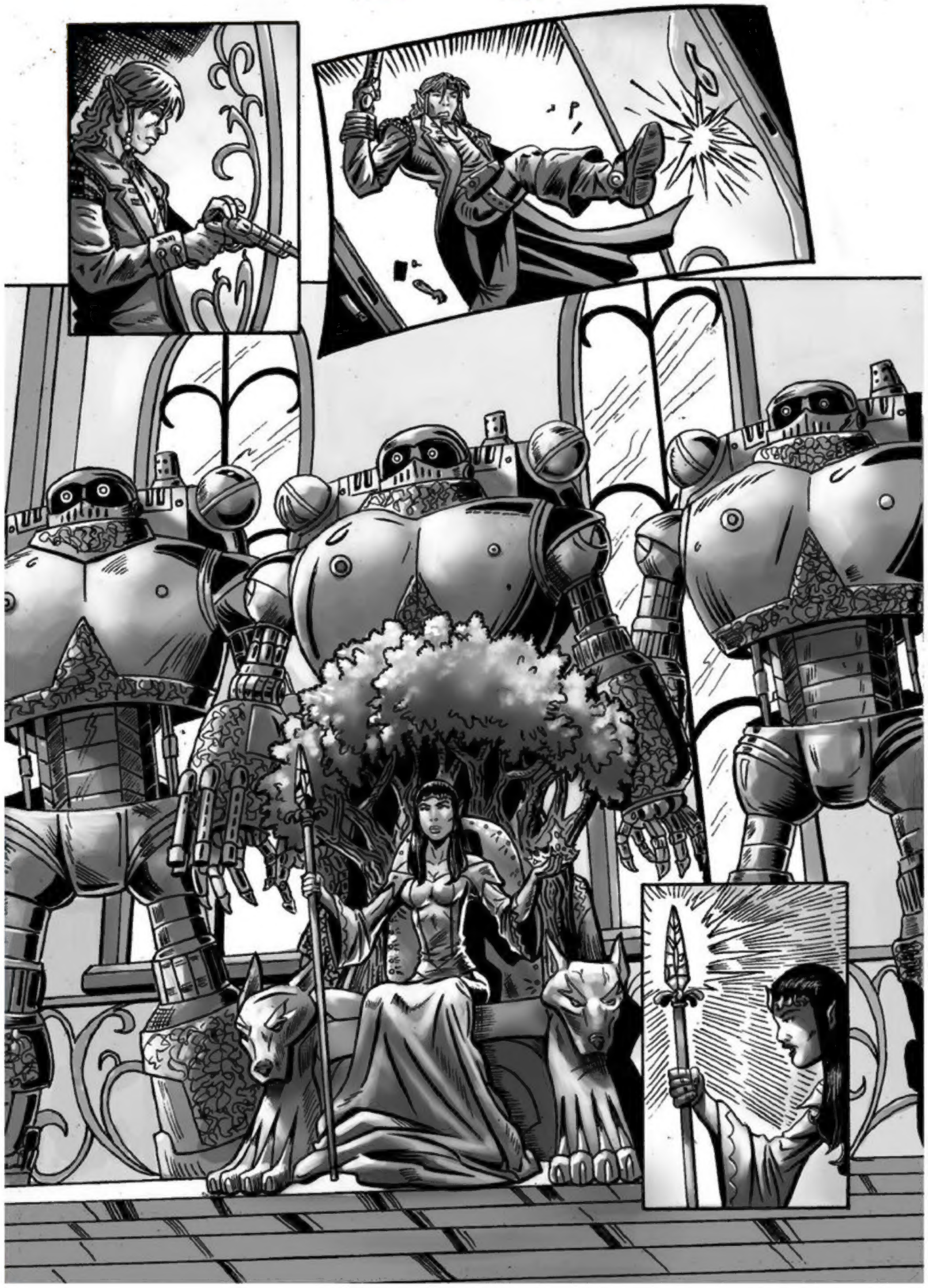

Sp!

The Comic Book Printers

Moonstone Books

Interview with Tim Lasiuta

by Amy Letts

Tim Lasiuta takes the hot seat to talk about Moonstone Books, a successful small press publishing company.

www.moonstonebooks.com

***SP!**: Who are you and what is Moonstone Books?*
TIM: My name is Tim Lasiuta, and I work with Joe Gentile, publisher and all around good guy of Moonstone Books. We have been around since the early 90s, and in that time, have been privileged to publish *The Phantom*, *Kolchak*, and *Buckaroo Banzai* in comic book form. We publish anthologies, and some of our favourites include *Zorro*, *The Spider*, *The Green Hornet*, *Honey West*, *The Lone Ranger*, *Kolchak*, *The Avenger*, *Sherlock Holmes*, and many other horror projects. We are based in Calumet City, Illinois, but our tendrils extend throughout pulp- and comic-dom.

To paraphrase the website blurb, "We publish fine and distinct comic books, graphic novels, and prose;. books that are meant to be read. We bring you classic and new heroes in thrilling tales of adventure, mystery, and horror! And comics and Illustrated fiction, from the dark side to the light..."

SP!: What's Moonstone Books' origin story?
TIM: Moonstone Books rose from the ashes of a Chicago publishing company that never got off the ground. When that company disappeared, we just had so many finished projects with no homes, we didn't know what to do. After much ado, Dave Ulanksi, Rafael Nieves, and Joe Gentile decided that we would go it on our own! Since that time, every project has been a labour of love.

SP!: Is Moonstone Books more of a 'Hands On' or 'Hands Off' Publisher? Do you have a lot of control over projects, or are creators allowed a free-reign?
TIM: Moonstone Books operates with a 'sandbox' mentality. For anthologies, we have invited authors to 'play' with our licensed properties. We do provide character bibles, and frequently, writers do use them. When it comes to our creator-owned properties, we let 'em go. The '*Ranger* book is an example of how many views of the Masked Man and supporting characters writers have. The resulting book is outstanding, from a variety of narrative viewpoints and themes.

SP!: Describe the typical process of bringing a new book to press.
TIM: Book production is a very defined process. Whether it's DC, Tor-Forge, or Archie, the only differences are how quickly books see the light of day, and what kind of resources the publishers have. In our case, we will use the *Captain Midnight* Book as an example. We decided to do an anthology, and compiled a list of authors who might be interested in contributing to the book. As Captain Midnight was public domain, we did not have to worry about contracts, but with the *Honey West* book (forthcoming), we had to negotiate a contract. With *The Green Hornet*, it took around a year to get the contract, and a year to do the book. While doing so, we produced a rough character bible, and once potential authors accepted our conditions, sent it out to them. The scribes sent in a rough story plot, and we said "nay" or "yea". If yea, then we gave them a deadline to produce their Midnight Masterpiece. Once the editor, Win-Scott Eckert, received the tales, he edited them and they were re-read and compiled. In the case of this book, we had interior art done which matched the stories and had two covers done for the book. The book was designed by the Simian Brothers, and once the stories were formatted and readied for pre-press, another edit was done. Around this time, we solicited the book through Diamond, and it was sent to press. Time from start to finish was probably a year.

For our comic book properties, the process is slightly different. As an example, if we are going to do a Kol-

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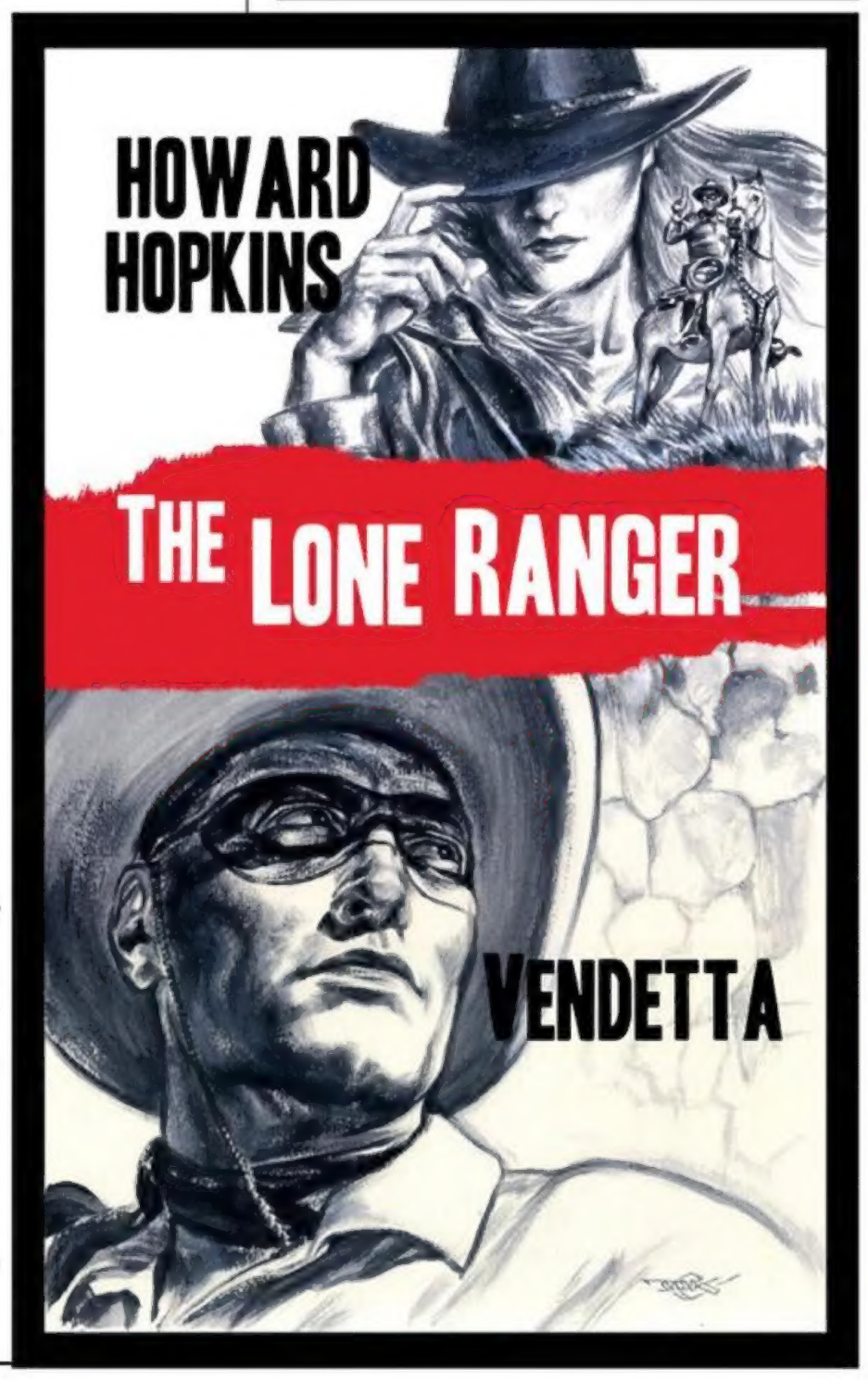
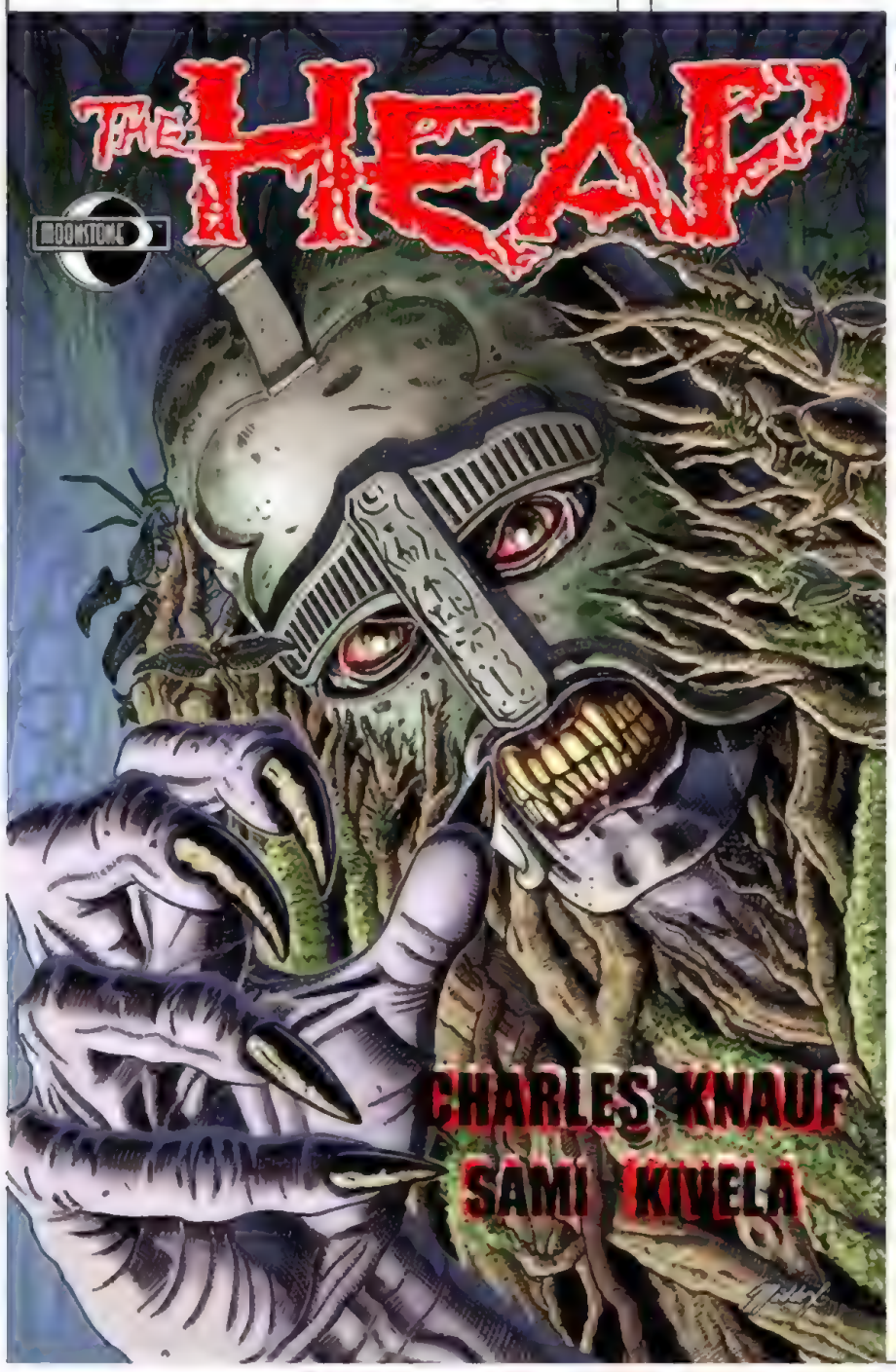


(Continued from page 10)
chak story, we approach our Kolchak writer, and get a plot synopsis. After the editor approves it, the writer fleshes it out into a full comic book script (DC method—frame by frame, balloon by balloon). Again, the story is edited, and greenlit. The art is done by our assigned artist, pencilling/inking, lettering, colouring, digital creation of file, solicitation by Diamond Distributors, and then, publishing. Of course, we accept the Eisner for both anthology and comic book story....

SP!: What qualities do you look for in writers?

TIM: Grey hair. A revolver in their computer desk. A slouch hat on their hat rack. Cape. Mask optional... As publishers of pulp-related materials, licensed properties, and anthologies, we primarily look for writers with great imagination, great writing and editing skills, and enthusiasm—writers who have long dreamt of writing their Spider, Honey West, or Avenger opus. Over many years of publishing anthologies, we have developed a wide and talented pool of writers, from legendary scribes like Denny O'Neil, Steve Englehart, Johnny Boggs, Devin Grayson, to newbies who have so much talent it oozes out. Our writers are professionals primarily, or very talented semi-pros, who can take a germ of an idea and turn it into a great read. With our licensed characters, following our character bibles is important, but if we can err on the side of dramatic effect without changing the character, we allow that. Unlike another company, we pride ourselves in representing characters the way your fathers remembered them, with slight changes to make them appealing to modern readers.



SP!: What is your stance on the print versus digital media argument?

TIM: As publishers, we have entered the digital world with Comixology, Kindle, and eBooks. I think that if we are serious about reaching readers with our products, then we have to be serious about meeting readers where they are. If we are going to NY Comic Con and see fans reading *The Spider* on their iPad, great. If we see someone fingering a well worn copy of *The Phanton Chronicles*, that is great too. We love print, and most of our contributors probably have bookshelves overflowing with pulp, art, and biographies of comic legends, but as our audience changes, so must we. Recently, we released a couple of books digital first, then went to print, and they have been successful. We have also entered the audio novel realm, with narrated adventures of some of our favourite books. Digital? Print? As long as readers pick up their favourite books and read until they go blind, we are just as happy.

SP!: What do you think it takes for a publishing company to survive in 'the new' publishing industry?

TIM: This is a tougher question, as the rules for survival in this day and age keep changing. We have seen DC and Marvel re-invent themselves to great reviews and sales. We have seen comic books invade the big screen with scores of movies being produced with varying successes. *The Walking Dead* keeps trotting along and builds a greater audience each episode. With *Arrow* coming to TV soon, along with the DC comic book cartoon presence, it is vital to keep an eye towards licensing your books and characters to a wider audience. Not every company has a film/TV production in tow. With the greater synergy between film and comics, and more obvious co-operation between studios and the graphic novel industry, every company has its efforts to become the next hit. While Moonstone

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has had interest from film companies, nothing has gelled yet, but we have created a niche market for our books and comics.

One of my favorite books, *Zombies vs Cheerleaders*, is already a media darling, and our book just builds on that reputation. It sells well, and speaks to those fans who appreciate good Cheerleader violence. Our *Kolchak* book has a loyal following, and attracts great attention from collectors and writers wanting to put Kolchak in the way of another demon. Our *Phantom* book is the longest running American publication of the Lee Falk creation. All of us at Moonstone were, and still are, very proud of our Phantom line. I think what I am trying to say is that success is not just based on market penetration and sales, but rather a dedicated following of a specific book. We have that. Another element is that of being unique. We have *The Spider*, *Honey West*, *Zombies vs Cheerleaders*, *The Green Hornet*, *Avenger*, *The Phantom*, *The Lone Ranger* (fiction), *Kolchak*, and so many other one-of-a-kind 'heroes'. We are, indeed, unique and enjoy that distinction.

We also, as previously answered, are not afraid of trying to put our product into different markets and different formats. We use 'wide vision' formats for our graphic novels, audio books for our fiction, digital formats for our iPad/Kindle readers, and, of course, we use a variety of print distribution sources to reach readers.

Again, as long as we continue to attract readers, passionate creators, and media attention—like this interview—we will be around for another 25 years.

SP!: what do you look for in comic and graphic artists? Does Moonstone Books have a visual style?

TIM: Moonstone Books do not really have a visual style. With a wide variety of different characters, we have tried to keep our looks unique and distinctive. For *Kolchak*, we tend to go to a more 'spooky' look, kinda like a Kirby/Simon horror feel, but updated. (Perhaps a *Phantom Stranger* style, as executed by Aparo). *ZvC* is a cartoony, simplistic style. The focus of that book is not the art...Our *Honey West* book has ranged from a simple to a more detailed look. With our pulp books, we have gone to a noir-inspired style for covers and interiors. Some of our artists have gone on to other companies, like DC and Marvel, and created a niche for themselves. To more directly answer your question, we use a full-script method, and expect our artists to be able to execute that. Obviously, good technical and artistic skills are very useful in this industry, whether you work for DC, DE, IDW, or Marvel.

SP!: What's the future for Moonstone Books?

TIM: We will continue to look for properties ready for the Moonstone touch, and publish comic books, graphic novels, wide-vision novels, and anthologies based on the characters we love to read and write about. We, to paraphrase *Star Trek*, will continue our 20-year mission to boldly go where no publisher has gone before, to seek out new (and exciting) properties... (Cue theme music!)

SP!: Okay, last question, and it isn't really a question. This is open mic: Your chance to say anything you want to about Moonstone Books.

TIM: I am constantly amazed at the variety and skill of creators we attract to our products. Having been around for 20 years, and associating with the creators we have so far, this has been fun. We have met the legends, and near-legends. We have hired extraordinary talents, helped creators develop their talents, and returned characters to the public eye in a respectful way. Most importantly, we have had fun. Have we won every battle? I would like to say "yes," but we have had the opportunity to negotiate for more than one character and come second. Through this, we remain passionate and ready to take on new challenges. For myself, I started out with Moonstone by writing reviews for CBG, and here I am, doing interviews for Moonstone Books. I am thankful that Joe Gentile had faith in me and invited me to come and play in the sandbox. It is very interesting that many of the characters that I enjoyed reading as a kid, are characters we publish. When I first wrote my Tom Gill autobiography (www.lonerangercartoonist.com), I wanted to do a fiction book. A mere eight years later, here we are. Many of the books we do have a link to our childhoods and to our early reading years. It is so interesting to look back at my emails and see Philip Jose Farmer refuse to write a Green Hornet tale, as he was pretty near written out (at nearly 90)!. Or have Stephen King say no, politely. That said, I think our publishing model is one of opportunity. Opportunity to write about what you like, opportunity to see your work published, and opportunity to develop a creative 'home'. Fans can find us online on Facebook and at www.moonstonebooks.com

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SP! Correspondent Amy Letts works at her own webcomic:
www.comicofepicfail.com
As well as other creative endeavours.

Additional conversation about this article can be seen at:
http://www.selfpubmag.com/news/view/articles/moonstone-books.htm

On the Horrors of Popular Culture

An Interview with the Author of The Hex Factor

By Ellen Fleischer

Darren Worrow is a writer, cartoonist, illustrator, and designer. He has self-published comics, such as Toonedelic Times, Rat-Arsed and Shit-faced, *and* The Scribbling Horse. More recently, he has turned his hand to novels. SP! Magazine *caught up with Darren to discuss his recent release,* The Hex Factor.

SP!: What can you tell me about your background?

DW: My childhood ambition—besides the time I wanted to be a milkman, stole my mother's milk bottles from the fridge and put them on the neighbor's doorsteps—was to be a cartoonist. I was inspired by the Great British institutions, the *Beano* and *Dandy* comics; I'd read them and copy the characters. Before long, I'd submitting a comic story for my school rag. I ran off with the dream of getting a syndicated strip and moving to the US to be the next Jim Davis or Charles Schultz… I wished!

As a teenager, and in my early 20s, I started to draw cartoons for local music papers, punk-paste zines, FINs (Free Information Networks), and a few more mainstream magazines. It was my introduction to the world of self-publishing, and after many rejection slips from the big publishers I felt at home self-publishing. The freedom to say whatever I wanted suited me, as I indulged in the youth culture of acid house and rave, which inspired some pretty outrageous subject matter.

The next logical step was to put together a comic of my own, and in 1995 I ran 300 copies off of *Toonedelic Times*. Self-publishing is hard work and a labor of love, but I failed to put the effort in to marketing, so things began to slack. It took five years before I started it all up again. Redundancy was facing me in my "real" job and therefore, I had time on my hands to work on something new. Refreshed, I came up with two drunken, drugged-up would-be superheroes called *Rat Arsed and Shit Faced*. If the title didn't raise some eyebrows, then the content certainly did, and slowly I began to get some acclaim in the UK small press comic scene. The comic shops began to stock them and I received good reviews, producing another two episodes in-between publishing more issues of

Toonedelic Times, which had become an anthology-based comic zine, which ran for the best part of ten years.

I gave up the crazy hedonistic lifestyle and the comic that represented it when I settled down to have a family; there was now no time to put pen to paper, and what's more, the subject matter just didn't match the track my life was on. Before I did this, I put out one last comic, *The Scribbling Horse*, a story based around my local pub, focused through the eyes of the two dirty, scrounging pub dogs. This opened a new can of worms for me, as I only wrote it and passed it on to Richard Nairn, a much more accomplished artist and regular contributor *to Toonedelic*, to illustrate.

It now seemed I favored the writing side to comics to the artwork. So after getting a Kindle for my birthday a year ago, and realizing I could get off my artistically void ass and self-publish through Amazon, I set out on a new road to write comedy novels. Nice and easy, no ink-splodges!

SP!: Is The Hex Factor *your first novel?*

DW: No, my first shot was *The Hargreaves Code*, which I refer to as a half-baked parody (meaning it's got its own narrative and only bears resemblance to the parodied work for the purpose of the gags), based on Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code*. Five star review on amazon.co.uk and, at this time, my best seller!

My second novel was *That Night This Night*—a kind of caricatured autobiography-come— black—comedy, which is my most serious book. I don't do serious that well, so its chock full of outrageous humour to boot! Oh, and the names have been changed to protect the (not so) innocent!

Then came *The Hex Factor*, and since then, I've written a quick parody of *The Terminator*, called *The Perminator*, which, after the more satirical nature of *The Hex Factor*, is an all-out roller-coaster ride of madness and nonsensical laughs.

SP!: What inspired you to write The Hex Factor*?*

DW: Frustration! My son likes to watch these pop TV talent shows that come along every autumn and drag out until December, thereby dominating the Christmas pop charts with dreadful, manufactured dribble. I generally endure them in the background while I read. I was reading some classic horror at the time—you know, Bram Stoker and Mary Shelly. That was when I figured out that these big-shot music producers suffocate creativity from the youth of today, even suck the life out of them like vampires, in order to force them to conform to the squeaky-clean persona of the modern pop star.

SP!: Can you tell me a bit about the story? What drives your characters?

DW: Teenage anguish—that time when you are neither child nor adult, but a frustrated hybrid that wallows in self-

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(Continued from page 13)
pity. That's the opening for my protagonist, John Butcher, who comes from a broken home and feels he is ignored and only ever pushed into butchery—the family trade—when really, he holds a dream of pop stardom and a raw talent to sing. Of course, his adventure changes his values and opinions.

John enters The X-Factor and goes through to the winner's house, based in Barbados. What he thinks is going to be the dream holiday turns out to be a horrific episode, when spooky things start to happen to him and the other contestants. The first one goes missing, the next gets murdered, and John and his friends start to uncover an evil conspiracy by the producers of the show. Things are not as they first seem, when suspects turn out to be allies and the plot twists and turns until the show's finale, when the characters use the circumstances to make a point about the state of the music industry.

SP!: I notice that you're using monsters that are very familiar to most readers of horror and suspense: vampires, werewolves, zombies, etc. What fresh angles are your pursuing?

DW: Yeah, because there are a lot of contestants in a show like this, it follows that there are a lot of characters. This was a great challenge to get the consistency right and I tried to tell the narrative from different viewpoints and also use different formulas; while John's parts are written in the third person, the madman judge parts are written in the first person. The love interest, Sally's part is written as a diary; I was reading Anne Frank's not so long ago, and thought it would make an interesting touch. Another judge's parts are written in the form of letters, reflecting on the style of those classic horror books I mentioned.

Anyway, a lot of contestants—a lot to finish off in horror style! So, I wanted to grab a taste of as many familiar monsters as I could, but obviously give them a twist that related to the subject. So, there is a ghost of Buddy Holly, who gives John some sound music advice; a judge, who turns out to be a crazed psychopathic killer; a rock band of werewolves; a gorgeous girl band that turns into zombies; there is even a modern spin on Frankenstein's monster, when the doctor's ancestor clones Elvis. (Rock n Roll features quite a lot. I guess it was a time when pop music was raw despite being the first to be slightly manufactured.) As for the vampires, you'll have to read it!

SP!: Was it difficult keeping a balance between horror and dark comedy?
DW: It was a challenge, but otherwise, no, I think it flowed quite nicely. Like sci-fi, horror is a genre which begs to be given a satirical makeover; you just have to be careful not to tread on too many worn out clichés. This book may have a simpler concept than that of *The Hargreaves Code*, but it was, by far, more of a challenge to write. The comedy is not as crazy; it's more subtle, and therefore, an air of eeriness flows through quite nicely for true horror fans.

SP!: Who or what would you consider your major influences and inspiration for your writing?
DW: Perhaps, it harks back to the writers of those classic British comics, also the underground comics masters, Crumb, Shelton, and, particularly, Hunt Emerson. Then the master of the BD, Rene Goscinny, and those spooky graphic novelists, like Alan Moore.

In novels, I can think of no one more obvious than Douglas Adams, and children's authors, like Roald Dahl and Rudyard Kipling, alternative comedy, like Ben Elton and Richard Curtis. Then we have nonsensical humor, like Spike Milligan and Monty Python films. Also, I think anyone writing comedy should read Don Quixote—how many other books from the 1600s can still make you laugh out loud?

SP! Did you know from the start that you were going to self-publish? What made you go that route?
DW: As a child, I suppose I had that naive concept that a publisher would just magically jump out of the bushes and declare that they would grant me fame and fortune. Some people, after seeing my work, have given me promises they just couldn't keep, but I've learned to keep my feet on the floor. Self-publishing can be hard work for little reward other than the love of your medium, but there is a real community feel about it; a social aspect that I don't believe you get from mainstream publishing. So yes, once I discovered the DIY method, I was hooked on its freedom and social ambience.

SP!: What's your next project? Do you have any plans for a sequel?
DW: I am currently writing something which started out as a short story, thinking that perhaps, I would put out a series of comedy sci-fi shorts—a bit like a funny Philip K Dick. However, I have now developed the idea into a fuller story. I like this, as I can dive deeper into the characters and give them time to change or grow.

Anyway, it is called *White Space-Van Man*. A "white van man" is a journalist's sound bite here in the UK,

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which stereotypes delivery drivers as reckless and lawless maniacs of the road. I've taken that basic premise and put my man, Barry, into a space setting: delivering around the solar system, he encounters a bizarre set of circumstances that take him off on a crazy adventure, as all good sci-fi stories should!

As to sequels, I try to adopt Uncle Walt's phrase, "You can't top pigs with pigs." It might take a lot of convincing to get me to write a sequel.

SP!: Is there anything else we haven't touched on that you'd like to share with our readers?

DW: Only to say (and I guess I'm preaching to the converted here with your readers, but), support the small press, hail the self-publisher. You don't have to slap together a zine anymore; with the internet everyone has a voice, so if you find something creative you like, give them all the support you can, review books on sites like Amazon or blog and post links to them on social networks, and let your friends know—for this is the self-publisher's means of marketing, and they need it!

Search for me on Amazon, visit my website at www.darrenworrow.webs.com , like my Facebook page and/or follow me on Twitter, be good to meet you!

The Hex Factor *is available for the Kindle and may be downloaded at amazon.com.*

Ellen Fleischer serves as the copy editor of this magazine, and is always looking for additional paying jobs. Contact her at: estherdragonbat@yahoo.ca

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For more discussion about this article, go to:
http://www.selfpubmag.com/news/view/articles/on-the-horrors-of.htm

The State of Distributing Comics

An Article with Interview elements
By Ian Shires

Since making the decision to bring this magazine back (instead of just going off on more personal creative pursuits), I have been disillusioned about the state of support for publishers. Seeing so many people banging their heads against the social media wall of sound, and not seeing anyone saying,- "Hey, this worked, I'm gonna be able to make a living making my comic," it makes for a sad state of the indie scene. So I started digging around, and looking for things that are working. I sent out dozens of inquiries to companies, stating that I was preparing an article about the state of comics distribution. I heard back from three companies that were willing to talk about this: ComiXpress, Ka-blam/Indyplanet, and Drive-Thru Comics. The people at Kickstarter were at least nice enough to say they have no interest in participating. It looks like, moving forward toward follow-up articles, I will put a call out to any publishers out there willing to talk about what is working or not working for them, and take a look from that angle, next time.

Luckily, we have an article this issue that looks a little at Kickstarter (http://www.kickstarter.com/) from the publisher's side of it. I'll let that stand on its own, and just add a little commentary about the whole concept of "crowdfunding". If comics distribution wasn't abysmally broken, it would not be necessary to fund a project that way; people would be able to simply earn readers and a living by making good comics. Promoting and earning fans should not have to rely on gimmicks. Kickstarter is not the only game in town in crowdfunding, though. Indiegogo does a similar service, though I have not seen or heard of many people choosing that over Kickstarter. A site named Comics Accelerator (http://comicsaccelerator.com/) has just recently opened its doors. It has a few companies showing as signed up, but only one beta test project listed so far. There's a group called Wunderfunders, though I'm a little confused by it—it has something like six Facebook groups, and you see its members posting about using Kickstarter, but it's main website (http://www.wonderfunders.com/) says it's got its own funding platform. Digging a little further, nothing in its projects states that they are more than one percent funded and there are no success stories anywhere on the site. I also know that my good friend Jay Savage is looking into starting up a new crowdfunding site. We'll see how it goes and report on it as we can.

The point of all this is: I understand a start-up company needing to fund its very first project, pay for the artist and have up-front printing costs for those first few issues, and whatnot. But, if every publisher has to fund every book, the whole funding situation is going to kill itself. I have always been a big proponent of small print runs, building up as the audience does, till you have a fan base. So, while comics today do seem to be getting a boost from the existence of Kickstarter and like sites... is that as sustainable as just making good comics, and selling them to your fans? I guess, time will tell. So to wrap up the funding aspect, getting a book out into the comic book stores probably needs a more solid cash base than other avenues of winning fans and making a living at comics. So let's move on to that topic.

Diamond comic distribution (http://www.diamondcomics.com), has historically been the only game in town to effectively get your comic into brick-and-mortar stores around the USA. The problem is, you are competing with Superman and Spider-Man for shelf space, and your chance of success against companies with pockets deep enough to out-advertise well, anyone... is small. Very small. I have seen, over time, thousands of publishers try to make it... only to be cut permanently—because they did not meet minimum distribution thresholds. I am not going to say you can't make it with Diamond. I am going to say you shouldn't TRY—until you are absolutely sure you have enough fans to sell enough copies to meet those minimums. Actually earning and making a living is even harder, but it will beat getting shut out if your first book doesn't sell enough. So, where does that leave the REST of us? There is of course the debate about whether brick-and-mortar comic stores are going the way of movie rental stores. What are the alternatives to getting into comic stores? Cold Cut Distribution was a holdover from the heyday of the direct market, when indie comics would sell if they had a cool cover or a cool title. Cold Cut dwindled for a long time, till it was finally bought out by Haven Distribution, which attempted to re-kindle support for a non-Diamond comics distributor. Ultimately, it too fell. We've seen a number of companies recently trying to fill what they perceive as a need: creating a distributor that delivers to the direct market on a level where publishers can survive.

POD printer Ka-Blam has implemented a model of printing, distribution, and digital sales, which does its best to cover all the bases. It's evolved from the initial days of straight POD printing, to allow a publisher to go from zero to bookshelves with very little investment. How fast, how effectively, and how much you really earn are things that, really, only those using the system can report. I tried to obtain some idea of sales, but they played the privacy card there. However, Jenni Gregory did talk to me and shared some viewpoints. She told me that they still consider Indyplanet—both the digital and online store/distribution parts of it—as "in beta," and, down the road, change is likely. "Right now," she says, "we're still (almost a year later) in the stocking-the-store phase. The response from creators and publishers wanting to be listed at IndyPlanet Digital has been overwhelming and we've developed a huuuge backlog of titles waiting be listed. I wish they could go up faster,

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but since the printable documents we archive are imposed for print, they don't translate perfectly into files for ready for screen reading. We have to basically 'un-impose' them, reassemble doubles-reads, remove any print specific artifacts, re-size them, optimize them, and finally encrypt them. Most of that is automated, but it still takes time."

I took the opportunity to enter SP! #58 into their system, and ordered the mandatory one copy so it will be available. I'm waiting for the rest. So, my personal reporting from the inside will have to wait. I asked whether they rely on publishers to drive customers to their books or if they are going to actively work to increase how many people are reading and buying books. On that, Jenni says "We've got a marketing plan ready to go, but want to get more of the backlog cleared before we implement it completely. But of course comics—specifically independent comics—tend to be somewhat personal in expression, so a personal approach to marketing is always helpful. Over the years we found it to be true in almost all cases that the truly successful comics at IndyPlanet are the ones wherein the creators and/or publishers have a high amount of online interaction with their potential audience. Creator/publishers who are approachable, open and receptive with their fan base via social media (Twitter, Facebook, Google+, Ustream, etc.) tend to see more sales than those who value their anonymity." So what I am seeing here is a well-positioned, well-supported, and grandly-based model... which may or may not be supporting publishers to a living-level of profit at this point. Being in "beta" means that we're going to keep looking at it and reporting on what we learn. To get involved you'll want to start at the Ka-blam site, as the option to get into Indyplanet, leads there anyway: http://ka-blam.com/printing/front/

Before we move much further into the digital waters, let's touch on the new upstarts in print. One, called Red Beryl, made some promotional rounds on Facebook recently. I've tried to track them down, but no response, so far. Their system seems to be set up within the Comic Collector Live website, which is a vehicle for fans of mainstream comics to organize their collections, and buy and sell comics in a more ebay-like style. Their pitch sounds ambitious, but they only have a total of 22 books available for distribution as of this writing. I'll throw it out there as another place to try to get your books in, and for anyone to tell us more, if they can. My suspicion is, that without their own website and a lot more support, there aren't as many people visiting their site as they say in their info. http://www.comiccollectorlive.com/LiveData/Seller.aspx?id=5d9c9990-c15d-4a05-a703-88e0d7982f00

Let's not forget Lulu. Lulu is also a POD platform, which then hooks up to digital sales and has the advantage of being linked directly to Barnes and Noble, Amazon, and Nook. I have had friends that have used Lulu and sworn by it, and other friends, who have also left it and said "forget it". They did not respond to my humble request for information for this article, so I'm not really sure what to think of the site. Perhaps when I follow up this article with the one talking to publishers, I will be able to say more. Lulu covers a lot more than just comics. They can do anything from wedding books to calendars. I didn't take the time to compare pricings, because we're focusing on distribution in this article—but I mention it, as Lulu seems to be a lot more what you bring to it, than it is a place that has much interest in your direct success. When you're looking at "Search millions of independent titles" on the top of all their pages... You need to know what you're looking for before you get here; no one is going to stumble onto your book. But still, if you have an aggressive fan base, and can leverage being in Barnes and Noble, etc., this might have oomph for you. http://www.lulu.com

ComiXpress has yet to forge a digital delivery arm. They have, however, a solid distribution side. Books you print through their service can be given a retailer price, and are then available for order by all retailers set up in their system. They don't disclose the number of stores in their system, nor do they run a store locator, so how much this is working, is something we'd need to find out from publishers. After they initially agreed to talk to me for this article, they did not respond to the questions I sent.

That's really it, as far as print

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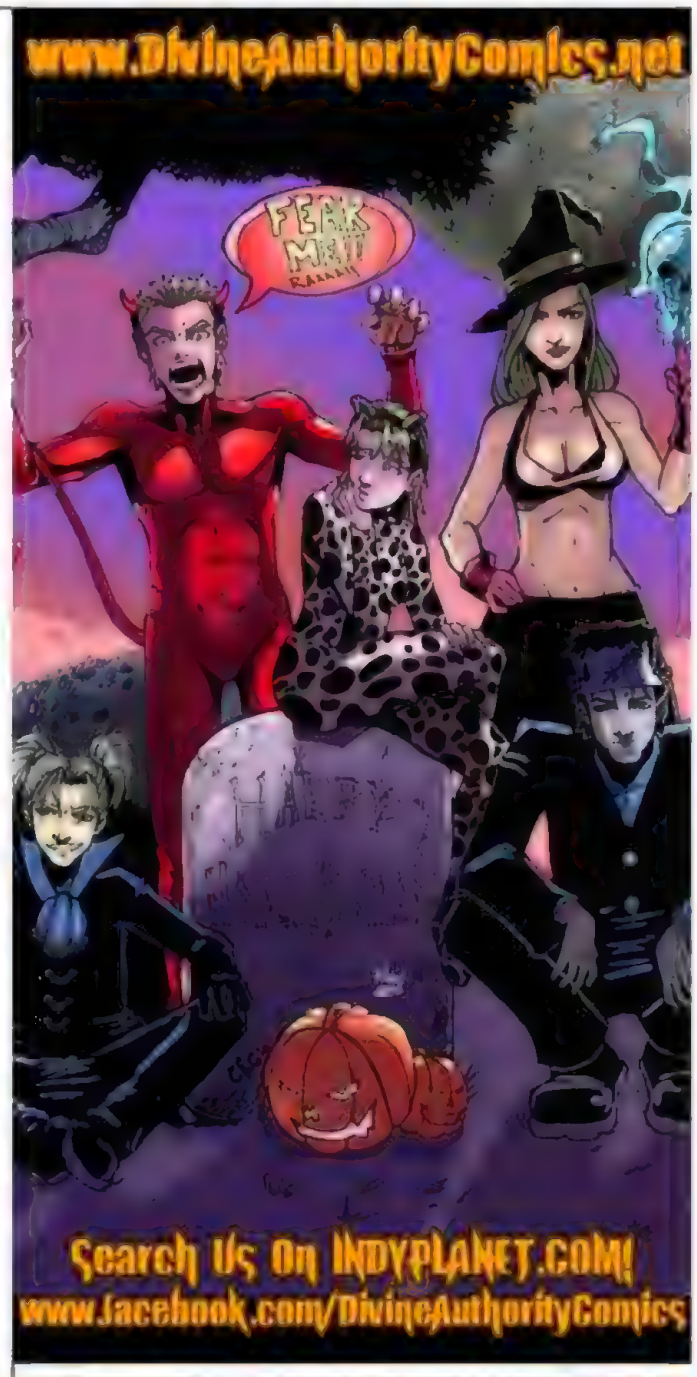

www.DriveThruComics.com

distribution. Other than that, you're left to your own ability to contact comic stores and offer them your comic at a discount. Self-distribution does work for some, and you can find a few comic store locators by typing those keywords into a search engine. However, I have in the past found that a large percentage of comic stores listed in such locators, end up being gone. I once did a mailing with about 40% of the samples I sent to stores, returned to sender. Learn from my expensive mistake. The proportion of publishers subsidizing their incomes through other day jobs, is staggering. Indie publishing is largely a hobby situation for most. SP! Will do everything it can to help you not waste your hard earned $$.

And then, there is Digital. Many say that it's the future, and who knows, it may well be. I like to think people will always want to print physical publications, that a collection of publications has value. But, when it comes to readers reading to enjoy what is on the pages... digital is a completely valid option—every bit as valid as digital music. I enjoy my digital music collection on a constant and steady basis, and my cassette and CD collections sit in storage. I now have way more digital music than I ever had physical. And from an "enjoy music" standpoint, that's fine.

I asked those who participated in my preparations for this article if they saw any trends in digital delivery. Largely, everyone is using PDF. I have seen and heard of other formats, some that require digital readers to protect digital rights, etc. Our friend Jenni at Ka-Blam says, "We've intentionally shied away from proprietary formats. Our downloads are encrypted, retinal resolution PDFs, which work terrifically on numerous readers ... from the comics-specific, like Comic Zeal, to ebook readers, like iBooks and the Kindle.", Matt McElroy from DriveThru Comics, says, "PDF is by far the most popular format currently, but we do have publishers uploading books in ePub, CBZ, and other formats, too. We support all of them, as well as try to be as device-agnostic as possible. We want the products we're offering to look great on as many devices as possible. We work with our publishers to make sure any issues customers have with their books are resolved quickly."

DriveThru COMICS

Setting up with DriveThru proved to be an absolute breeze. It only took a few hours from setting up my account to having a live magazine issue available for download (although I suspect Matt knew I was setting up, and sped my approval. I cannot guarantee that everyone will be up that fast.) Furthermore, Matt informed me that "while DriveThruComics.com started out as a digital-only storefront, and that continues to be our main focus when it comes to products, about a year ago, we actually added print-on-demand tools for our publishers to use if they wish. We now have almost one hundred titles in print, in addition to the thousands of digital products."

For me, just the fact that I do not HAVE to print a copy to get listed is a plus. It allows for the digital side to be more responsive. While I have not fully investigated their POD, I have read that it is integrated with Lightning Source, which is a BIG POD company with sources in the USA and Britain—which means that shipping overseas is not as big a deal as with a USA-only company. I asked Matt about his thoughts on print versus digital, since unlike the other digital places I talked to, DriveThru didn't grow out of POD, but instead into it. "I think print will always have a place in the market, especially for collectors and at conventions. What we're offering is, for publishers big and small, a way to reach comic fans around the world, who may not have a local store, or who prefer to read their comics on their iPads, Kindles, etc."

I dug a bit deeper to see how they promote publishers using their system. They have reviewers to whom publishers can opt to send free copies of their PDFs, and those reviews are then displayed in a section accessible to readers. That's a big plus here as well. Matt adds, "We actively reach out to new readers via social media, like Facebook, Twitter, and other channels. We also work with comic bloggers and reviewers to talk about the comics we carry on the site, thus getting the coolest books in front of their audiences as well. We have an excellent affiliate program that folks can sign up for and help promote their favourite books on our sites." Overall, I was very impressed with DriveThru's set up. The one thing they have not tackled, though, is distribution. You're on your own when it comes to selling physical copies in stores.

Other digital places include Graphicly (http://graphicly.com), which boasts that it's the place to get readers. I have not yet set up SP! in their free option, but plan to, so we can see how well it really works. It seems to be set up to automatically translate your content to many different reader-formats, and there's an app to download for your browser. In the course of writing this article, I have spent the most time with the people who actually talked to SP!, so, I will reserve judgement and opinion here, till I can follow up on it more from the inside, as I work to get SP! out to more readers. I have heard favourable things about them here and there, and have not heard anything bad, yet. Perhaps they will let us pick their brains more closely in the future.

Comixology (http://www.comixology.com/) is obviously geared more towards mainstream comic readers, with sections for Marvel, DC, and then, FREE Comics... though you can find more publishers with titles for sale in the browse tab. There are a number of tools available to help you keep track of titles you want to follow, and get print copies. This is another place which, as the deadline for this article loomed, I found I did not have time to delve into enough.

In fact, I think I need to bring this report to a close. I'm going to proudly present the results that I have so far, with a promise to SP! Readers that this subject is far from over. I must say, I truly appreciated the feedback and participation we did get from the few companies that responded to my inquiries. So far, it's obvious to me that there is no one solution to a publisher's task of getting their publications known and seen by potential readers. We're

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seeing a wide range of options and knowing how to use each one properly is something that can't be learned in one month and stuffed into one article. So, at this stage, we're seeing a good number of things to latch onto, but now, we need feedback from more of the people who are taking advantage of these options. To really formulate a way to guide publishers down a road of success, those of us who are scratching to get by need to start sharing info in useful ways. The market developments we're seeing seem to have readers spread out everywhere. I am looking forward to feedback on this, and the next step—as much as anyone reading this.

Ian Shires, well, doesn't need this space to promote what he does. Instead, take a moment to consider spreading the word about this article.

For further discussion about this topic, please go to:
http://www.selfpubmag.com/news/view/articles/the-state-of.htm

A Tale of Two Kickstarters

By Jennifer "Scraps" Walker

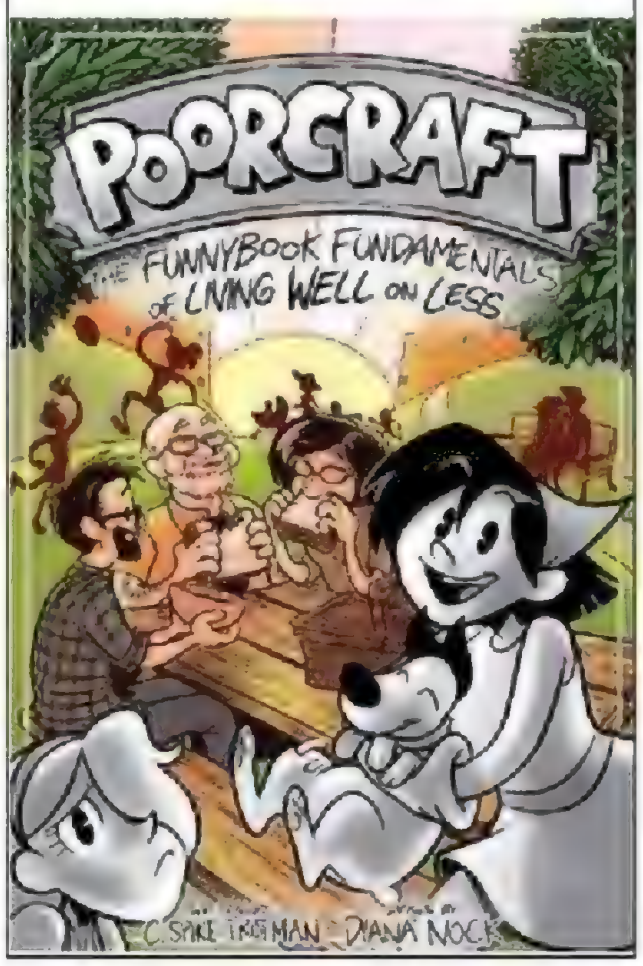
It was the best of crowd-funding, it was the worst of crowd-funding…And that's only a slight exaggeration. Back in 2009, Kickstarter was still in beta. In order to get your foot in the door, you needed approval from the powers-that-be or an invitation from a current Kickstarter member. Once granted access, you could then post your project for the entire internet to see and, hopefully, throw some money at.

Since then, Kickstarter has become a powerhouse for individuals, independent artists, and small and large businesses alike to crowd-source the funding for new products. It was, and still is, a great proving-ground to see if there's interest enough to create a new widget, release a new album, or produce a new film or webseries. And comic creators are flocking to it in droves.

But, back to 2009. Via Twitter I heard about one such Kickstarter campaign, *Poorcraft: A Comic Book Guide to Frugal Urban and Suburban Living*. C. Spike Trotman, creator of the webcomic *Templar, Az.*, is well-known and well-respected in webcomic circles and pretty successful at self-publishing. She supports herself solely on her webcomic, and that's still no mean feat. If she was in favour of the platform, I thought, it was worth checking out. This was my introduction to Kickstarter. Angel investors and start-up capital are an entrepreneur's wet dream, and Kickstarter seemed to be a way for the "little guys" to build just that sort of ground-floor support for a fledgling idea. I had book project sitting in a notebook, just waiting for its turn on my desk. I'd also just finished a 2.5-year contract freelancing, so I had some time on my hands to devote to a new piece of work. I wrote up my story, created a video, and submitted my project for consideration. Within a week, I was approved and given 60 days to reach my funding goal.

While a lot of creators consider the Kickstarter platform pre-orders on steroids, the big difference is that you must reach your funding goal in order to get any money. Your backers pledge whatever amount they want to, but if you're shooting for $5,000 and only have $4,999 in pledges when your campaign closes? You get nothing.

The *Poorcraft* Kickstarter ran during the same period as my own campaign for *What to Feed Your Raiding Party* (October through December, 2009). While *Poorcraft* more than doubled its original funding goal ($13K raised), Raiding Party didn't quite reach 75% ($1K pledged). Both books were produced, however, and were published within a month of each other, in 2012.



Yes, even though I didn't reach my funding goal, I believed enough in the project to go ahead with production without the benefit of up-front funding. And, in hindsight, I am relieved I didn't reach full funding, since it took more than two years to complete the book. Had I received those funds in advance, I think the pressure would have been enormous and the stress commensurate. Had I been in the collective shoes of Trotman and Nock (Diana Nock, illustrator for *Poorcraft*), I can only imagine the elation at exceeding the original funding goal would have been overshadowed, as time went on. A book takes as long as a book takes, I've learned, and not having that kind of pressure was—for me at least—a blessing in disguise.

Still, the whole process of promoting an idea to prospective investors taught me a few things. And the unexpected parallel of my project with *Poorcraft*, taught me a few things more.

1. Start with a sound concept.
Okay, so that's a little obvious, but hear me out. If your idea is less-than-fleshed-out, it's going to be pretty obvious when you present it to the masses. People might have questions, and you need to be two steps ahead in order to instill confidence in your would-be investors.

2. Have a pre-existing fan-base.
If not, it's going to be that much harder to find backers. Of course, I did okay (I think), for having absolutely no stand-

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ing in the gaming community, but having more connections and inroads would have helped tremendously. An existing fan-base—even if your project is not in the same niche, can help by spreading the word—even if they don't pledge.

3. Be willing to hustle for pledges.
I reached out to gaming podcasts and gladly participated in any that responded. You have to be willing to tell everyone and anyone about your proposal. Maybe they'll back you, maybe they know someone else who will, but it's not an "if-you-post-it-they-will-pledge" field of dreams—you have to sell it.

4. Create rewards that people want.
The incentive program is what made Kickstarter somewhat unique. It was like pre-sales and public television had a love-child, and thus was created Kickstarter. Each project has different pledge levels and each level comes with a nice little kick-back for the donor. Things as simple as a thank-you, a postcard, a copy of the book/album/film when it's complete, all the way up to personal meet-and-greets, launch party invites, and having your likeness included in the work have been offered. But keep in mind, many of those incentives will present a cost to you, the creator.

5. Know how much you really need.
Aiming low so your project has a better chance of reaching the funding goal may seem like a good idea, but if it's not enough to cover your expenses, you've just shot yourself in the foot. If you need to, consult with someone who's good with numbers before posting your goal, but make sure your number is locked down and you can explain what the funds are for. Oh, and don't forget to factor in producing any of the tangible thank-you gifts you might be offering, the postage for said incentives, and the fees that'll be deducted from your total pledges by Kickstarter (5%) and Amazon Payments (3-5%).

6. Don't make promises you can't keep.
A book takes however long a book takes. Films have set-backs. That new app hit a major snag in execution. De-

lays are inevitable, but don't promise something you can't deliver. For some folks, this might mean not setting a date when the product will be complete, at least not a specific one. For others, it might mean doing most of the foundational research or pre-production before and during the Kickstarter campaign to speed up the delivery phase. My book took more than two years to finish. I don't think getting the funding upfront would have done anything to speed it up, but it would have increased my stress as the project dragged out.

7. Have a Plan B.
Maybe Kickstarter doesn't work for you. Maybe it succeeds beyond your wildest dreams. Have a plan for both contingencies. Maybe you still write your book, you just do Print-On-Demand instead of an upfront print run. Or maybe you're able to offer deluxe hardcover editions, because you tripled your funding goal (that's known as a stretch goal; an if-then situation you implement when things go exceedingly well). As you can tell, I opted to finish my book regardless of funding, mostly because of the support I got when I was promoting the Kickstarter campaign.

8. Follow through.
Sounds a lot like point 6, but this is after the funding dust settles. Realize that you have a contract with your backers to produce what you've promised. Make use of the tools Kickstarter provides (you can broadcast updates to all of your backers through the Kickstarter dashboard) to keep your folks in the know, so that no one has to wonder what's going on with the project. If you have a setback, be upfront and honest and have a plan for how you're going to fix it or move forward.
When all was said in done, 2012 saw the release of both *Poorcraft* and *What to Feed Your Raiding Party*. *Poorcraft* was delivered to its creators on pallets and required the rental of a storage area. *What to Feed Your Raiding Party* had an initial print run of 75 and could fit in my backseat with room to spare. It took them an entire weekend to sign the books and several shifts to send out all the pre-orders. It took me a few days to sketch the Artist's Editions, but nothing like what they went through.
And, yet, the end result is the same. There are two more self-published books in the world.
Kickstarter, and the other sites out there like it, is one of the best ways to see if your project has a future. Reaching a funding goal is just one part of it, though. The rest is your willingness to make something happen.

Jennifer "Scraps" Walker is the artist behind the webcomics *Cocktail Hour* and *Where the Geeks Are*. Her newest project, *What to Feed Your Raiding Party*, is the comic book cookbook that challenges gamers to cook their way out of the fast food dungeon. All of her current projects--blogs, cocktails, and comics--can be found via her online hub, www.jenniferwalkeronline.com.

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Interview with Brian Latimer

By John Helmer

Brian Latimer's craft includes penciling and concept design. He recently spent time with *Self Publisher! Magazine*'s roving reporter, John Michael Helmer, and discussed his career in comics and his future projects...

SP!: Where were you born and raised?
BRIAN: I was born in western Ohio, and when I was 15, my family moved to about an hour northwest of Columbus, which is the place I consider my hometown. I'm from the middle of nowhere, basically.

SP!: Tell us about yourself...
BRIAN: Well, I recently relocated to Dayton, Ohio. My beautiful girlfriend Cindy and I are expecting our first child, who is due mid-September. I play guitar and bass, and have been in about a half-dozen bands, but decided that wasn't for me. I enjoy well-crafted beers and fine foods, of which I was very pleased to discover Dayton has no shortage either.

SP!: How long have you been drawing comics?
BRIAN: I've been drawing since I could hold a pencil, but took on comics as a career choice when I was 25. I had the naive idea that "hey, I can draw! I'll draw comics!" and then I discovered how difficult that really is (hahaha)! It's only been within the last two or three years, that I feel I've gotten as good as I expect of myself.

SP!: How did you break into the industry drawing comic books?
BRIAN: I think the idea of "breaking in" is quickly becoming obsolete. Simply, because there're so many talented folks self-publishing, these days. To me, "breaking in" means getting a job at a major publisher, but that is only one option, now. However, to more directly answer your question, the first published comics job I got was actually when I was living in Israel, a few years ago. I did four pages, pencils and inks for a superhero book called *Zanzaria*. The story was in Hebrew, which is read right to left, so I had to draw the page sequences right to left. It took a little getting used to, but was a fun challenge.

SP!: Do you have any formal art training?
BRIAN: Not really. I never went to college. I can't decide if that was a good move or not, even all these years later. However, I bought and read every book I could on making comics, as well as on writing fiction, character design, acting, movie direction, graphic design, etc. These are all part of the process. I still love going into book stores and looking at the oversize coffee table books for photo reference. That's something I had to learn the hard way—get photo references for EVERYTHING!

SP!: Who are your artistic influences?
BRIAN: The first comics that really excited me were the "Calvin and Hobbes" dailies. The local paper, when I was a kid, didn't have a Sunday edition, so all I read were the daily strips—which are still often my favorites. There was always so much life and expression in the simplest brush strokes. In my early teens, I got into comic books just as Image was first starting, and I really liked Jim Lee and Sam Keith. Later, I started finding Vertigo's books, of which Sandman is still at the top of my list for quality storytelling in any media.

SP!: How do you focus when drawing?
BRIAN: Coffee. And lots of it (hahaha)! I used to have to take a really regimented approach—get up in the morning, sit down and draw first thing, and keep at it all day. But, recently, somewhere between moving, Cindy getting pregnant, and trying to maintain some kind of a social life, oh, and having a day job, all I really do now is turn on the radio, do a little warm-up sketching—either in my sketchbook or doing the thumbnails—and then hit the page. I got used to stopping and starting on the work out of necessity.

SP!: What types of technology do you use to draw?
BRIAN: Coffee!! Actually, I've probably used every tool available. I have a Wacom tablet that I've drawn with in PhotoShop—in fact, that last half of *Price for the Asking* was "penciled" in PhotoShop. I've struggled to get the look I want out of that, but have been getting better results lately. I've also been doing more coloring work, which is still kind of new for me. Mostly, I keep going back to good old paper, pencil, brush and ink. Specifically, my main pencil is a Staedtler 2mm drafting pencil, the 925 25-20—which is all aluminum. I was using HB lead for several years, but recently went to the harder 2H. My main eraser is the Pentel ClicErase. I also use a Staedtler battery-powered eraser for the superfine detail and cleanup work. The Pentel Pocket Brush is my go-to inking tool. I've been beating on mine for a couple of years, and as long as I keep it out of direct

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sun, it keeps going. I've been using Strathmore 200 series bristol for a while, but like the Canson Fanboy stock better. I had a lot of problems with the Strathmore pages bleeding when inked. Aside from that, I use several drafting triangles, straight edges, circle templates, French curves, etc., for when a free-hand line won't do the job.

SP!: What was the first comic book you ever read?

BRIAN: *Punisher War Journal* #7, I think. It had Wolverine guest star, and I had just discovered Wolverine in a cartoon series that was out around that time, and was fascinated by his claws. I remember that I thought his claws came out of his gloves, and when I saw he wasn't wearing his gloves in the comic, yet still had his claws, I was calling foul. Ironically, that issue was drawn by Jim Lee, whom I later became enamored with during *WildC.A.T.S.*, and then, during *Batman: Hush*.

SP!: Do you read any of the new comic books that are being published today? If so, which ones?

BRIAN: I go in spurts. I'll read a bunch for months, then I'll stop completely. I've been doing this for various reasons for years. Right now, I'm not reading anything. I will say, I rather enjoyed Paul Dini's run on *Zatanna*, who is a great, but horribly underused, character. I'm looking forward to Valiant getting back into the ring, but have yet to check out the new books. A while back, I went to the used book store and bought a huge pile of trades. Stuff like Eddie Campbell's *Bacchus*, *A Distant Soil*, *Hard Boiled*, and just whatever caught my interest. I discovered *Y the Last Man*, which is a really smart story. I like a lot of Alan Moore's work. Neil Gaiman. Warren Ellis. I love Tim Sale's Batman. But I don't really follow any particular characters. I never cared much for Superman or Spider-man. Wonder Woman has some good stories. I find myself gravitating towards the more obscure characters. I think that might be from when Bendis first came on at Marvel, had basically free reign on the D-list characters, and did some really amazing, smart storytelling. *Alias* is fantastic. I've noticed this ebb and flow of story quality within the industry. Seems like every ten or fifteen years, it goes through this cycle of doing amazing work, and then slowly moving toward pandering, shallow stories. Then the next wave of creators comes in and blows everyone out of the water. I'm hoping that wave shows up soon.

SP!: Print vs. Digital. Your thoughts…

BRIAN: I personally prefer print and paper. I've tried to read digital comics, and *Price for the Asking* was initially released as a weekly digital on ComicRelated.com, but I find it hard to concentrate on long stories when I'm reading them on a computer screen. Plus, and this was something I only discovered after I tried to read comics digitally, there is an intimacy to holding a paper book in your hands that looking at digital just doesn't provide. Maybe if I tried it on my iPad, I don't know. Will Eisner and Frank Miller talk about it in their book: that there is this act of cooperation between the reader and the creator, that is very particular to the medium, and perhaps to prose, as well. It's just the two of you, the reader and the creator, communicating ideas. TV and movies lack this interaction, because you don't go up and touch the screen. There's no physical interaction. I find that lack of physical interaction when reading digital comics a bit disappointing. However, I understand the internet has allowed a lot of really good material to have an audience, when it might not have had one via traditional publishers. So, there's certainly an upside.

SP!: What sources do you use for a cover image?

BRIAN: I'm not entirely sure how to answer that. I suppose the first source would be the script for the issue. My basic approach is to consider what's going on in the story (assuming I have access to the script before I start the cover. Sometimes that's not the case). I'll try out several designs in thumbnail—little drawings that are rough compositional ideas of how to position characters, the cover logo, series title, etc. I really enjoy the storytelling aspect of drawing, so even in a single image, pinup, or cover, whatever, I try to convey a scene. That's where I rely on the script to guide me, either to create a preview or an overview of the story. I keep working out ideas until something clicks. Over the years of drawing, I've learned to trust my instincts. If something feels right, I run with it. If not, I'll go back to the basic rules of composition and storytelling, and keep hacking at it. I've gotten pretty good at visualizing the image in my head, so a lot of the work is done before I even lay pencil to paper. Another approach I might take is the graphic approach. A very simple, bold image of a character or such. Tim Sale does this masterfully, and I envy his bold, energetic brush lines! Something I keep in mind when designing a cover, specifically, is that

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this is the front door of the book, the first impression. I want to create an image that is clear from across the room, to grab a potential buyer, make them walk over, pick up the book and buy it. If a reader can't see a cover because it blends in with all the other books on the rack, all your work inside the book is in vain.

SP!: What other mediums or genres have you drawn for?

BRIAN: Like I said earlier, I've been slowly getting better at working in the digital realm. Coloring is a new and exciting thing for me. I always considered myself a black-and-white artist, and only goofed around with crayons or colored pencils on occasion. But, once I tried doing a proper coloring job, I really enjoyed it. I found some good tutorials on YouTube, which helped a lot. But, understanding how color theory works is the foundation of my color work. I've also been doing some fun stuff with Copic markers. Mostly the warm grays on top of simple line work, similar to Adam Hughes's convention sketches. I've never really gotten into painting on canvas. It's a lot more prep work than I care to mess with. I've seen some traditional painting from Jason Eden that's rather exciting, and I'd like to try some things in the digital realm to approximate those techniques. I'd also like to do something like Daniel Acuna does, basically digitally-painted books. I'm still trying to figure that out, though. I'm always experimenting with new tools and techniques.

Pertaining to genres, I like to draw stories in a very humanistic way. I love making the characters feel as alive and real as possible, even if they are in completely fantastical situations. I've done superheroes, crime noir, the new story I'm working on, *The UnNaturals*, is a story about classic horror monsters that become superheroes, which is a lot of fun.

SP!: What project are you currently working on?

BRIAN: *The UnNaturals* for Twilight Star Studios, which is based locally, in Springfield, Ohio. It's written by Bill Gladman, who wrote the first *Price for the Asking* story arc, which I penciled. Working with Bill is always a lot of fun, because he's always very open to my ideas and excited about what I bring to his stories and characters. I was thoroughly impressed with Bill's script for *UnNaturals* #1. I felt it had a lot of great characters in the ensemble, and he created a strong foundation for me to focus on doing "method acting" via my drawing: presenting how the characters feel, what they think, etc., the real "in between the lines" elements of making the story work right in the art.

SP!: What future projects do you have in the works?

BRIAN: Well, being a father (hahaha)! I'm super excited about that, but aside from *The UnNaturals*, I don't have anything else slated. For now. It's still only June, so I'm sure I'll take on at least one more project before the end of the year. Since moving to Dayton, a short drive from Twilight Star's headquarters, I have become a member of that group, which is great. They've received me with open arms and I'm pumped to be part of such a creative, hard working group of people. I'm sure I'll be more involved with the inner workings of the studio as a whole, but I don't want to overdo it too quickly.

SP!: Do you have any words for aspiring artists?

BRIAN: Hmmm... There are a lot of pieces of advice that come to mind, but I'll say this: look around you. Observe what you see as objectively as possible. I'm not just talking, "Study and mimic your favorite artists". I'm saying, "Learn from your environment". I'm always walking or driving and thinking, "How would I render that on paper?" Or, more recently, "how would I color that?" The tools you use will only get you so far. It's your brain, your thinking, that will set you apart as an artist. I've studied everything from architecture to method acting, and it all has to be pieced together by the artist in a seamless, convincing way or the story won't work. A comics artist literally has to be able to draw ANYTHING that exists, and even things that don't exist. Look around you. Gather references. Pay attention.

SP!: How can fans and publishers get hold of you?

BRIAN: My e-mail is brianlatimer117@gmail.com, or follow me on Twitter, @brian_latimer, or Facebook, under my plain, old, boring name. Also, I have a DeviantArt page that is in desperate need of attention; my handle there is BrianLatimer.

SP!: Brian, we appreciate your time. All the best.

BRIAN: It was a pleasure! Hope to see you at the cons.

John Helmer's Interviews and more can be followed at: comicbookinterviews.com

Memories

By Adalberto "Fonz" McFarlane

I am mainly a self-taught artist. I never really had any type of formal training; I'd just draw from photos and sit on a bench, drawing from life. My first how-to book on drawing, I received from my mother: Jack Hamm's *Drawing the Head and Figure* (available on Amazon, together with other books by Mr. Hamm). This was my main teaching tool for learning how to draw the human form. I loved this book and I still own it, along with the rest of the series. This series presented concise lessons and instructions. Then, in 1977, comic books came into my life—again, courtesy of my mother. She had gotten me an issue of *Spider-Man* and the first issue of the Marvel Comics *Star Wars* series, with artwork by Howard Chaykin.

How many of us tried to copy that cool character pose we saw either on the cover or in the story? None of us could do Darth Vader's helmet right! How many of us bought the infamous *Marvel Comics Try-Out Book* with the cool John Romita, Jr. artwork? The only person who won that contest was Mark Bagley! For me, it was how I first learned about the proper tools of the trade (pencil, non-photo blue pencil, crowquill pen, India ink, etc.). Then I discovered that all-time classic tome, *How to Draw Comics the Marvel Way* by Stan Lee and the late John Buscema. I bet, just from that book alone, a lot of readers started doing their own comics.

I love art. I love to draw, paint, and just plain create. I do understand that this is a business first (especially if you're trying to make money at it). If you love this medium and are not into the financial aspect of it, then do your comics and post them for free on the Internet. It is up to you, I'm getting more into the "old masters" and classic-style artists (i.e. the late Frank Frazetta, Al Williamson, Mark Schultz, etc.), and if you've seen their work, you know what I'm talking about. Last bit of advice: All you artists out there, keep on improving your art—try different media, like watercolor, pastels, oil painting, etc... And enjoy the journey. I am.

Please feel free to email any questions or comments to me at publish@ninenappy.com and I'll be happy to respond. Until next issue!

Adalberto "Fonz" McFarlane is the founder of NINE Nappy Publishing, a division of NINE Nappy Productions, the creator and illustrator of the action/adventure comic book series ***Michael R. Sloane: Walking Through the Belly of the Beast****. A resident of Sacramento, CA he plans on attending more comic book conventions this year. You can see more of his work at http://www.ninenappy.com*

For further discussion of this article, please go to:
www.selfpubmag.com/news/view/articles/memories.htm

Presenting Yourself

By Jay Savage

This issue's column is a little off topic, but I feel that it is needed, after what I saw this past weekend at the Las Vegas Comic Expo. With that said, let's dive right in. The Las Vegas Comic Expo was this past weekend September 29th and 30th, at the Riviera Convention Center. Now this is the first comic con to be held in Las Vegas in ten years, and I have to say, it was one of the better cons I have attended in a long while! The fans were eager and frothing at the bit to get a good dosage of comic greatness. The creators were out in full force, with a lot of big industry names as well. So, naturally, after spending two days at my table in Artist Alley, I figured this would be a great topic for this issues article. The following is only what I witnessed and my experience at this convention. This is all personal opinion, and I urge you to take it in and process it on your own terms.

Now, presenting work at a convention is one thing, and you will find many methods of displaying goods at these conventions. You can usually figure out how you would like to present your work by walking around the floor and paying attention to what others are doing, and then doing what best fits your budget. However, no one ever really pays attention to how to present yourself as a professional and as a human being. Some of the things I saw creators doing were crazy, and about as impersonal as you can get. It really seemed to me that more creators were worried about making money than they were about customer service. Reading comics is fun. Creating comics is a business and you need to treat it as such. I don't mean just worrying about the sales, but your customer base, in this case, comic FANS. Yes the fans should be your number one priority, whether actually purchasing your amazing art, or just talking comics. I saw creators who did not sit for the entire con, but loomed over their table, waiting for someone to speak to them. Needless to say, they stood for two days without making a sale or an interaction with another person. Noticing this, I started a little research project, if you will. I stood up in the same manner for one hour and NO ONE acknowledged me. I can only relate this method of manning your table to talking to a child. When talking to a young child in a delicate situation you should ALWAYS approach the child on their level. Get down on a knee before you speak and watch child be 100 percent more responsive, because you are now on their level and they feel more confident.

No one wants to be pressured or intimidated by another person. You would not want to buy a car from a salesman who stood two feet away from you, staring at you while you looked at cars, so why buy an indie comic from the intimidating new guy trying to make a name for themselves at a con? I noticed people standing in front of their booths, basically trying to snatch people walking by their tables. Come on, guys, no one wants to be kidnapped and then pressured to buy something at a con. I also witnessed creators leaving their tables for quite a long time, or leaving early altogether. The exhibitors around me did not do well at all, and looked very discouraged.

Now, the method of approaching fans I adopted was very hard to put into action, but being myself and treating them the same way I like to be treated as a customer in general, worked very well. I never stood up at my table. I sat, which seemed to give the impression that I was more approachable than the others, and that I was not going to pressure anyone into buying anything. I also asked every single person who walked by how they were doing, as this opened up conversation. Some would answer with "Great, how are you?" while others would stop and check out my prints, and some just kept walking. My goal was to acknowledge every person who walked past my table. When someone would approach, I greeted them politely, and then, I SHUT UP and let them look. My welcome speech was short and sweet. I simply said, "Hi how are you? Are you enjoying the con?" I would then state that the art on the table was done by myself and I appreciated them taking a look. That's it; not a word more, unless they had questions.

In the meantime, I continued to greet other attendees that passed by. This led to having at least four or five people at the table, pretty much at all times. I NEVER asked if they saw something they liked, but tried to let the work speak for itself. I let the art do its job, while I concentrated on the PERSON that stood in front of me. I took pictures with kids, I did a few sketches, but not many, as I wanted to be free to engage each attendee on a more personal and human level. Sometimes I would get up and stand to the side of my table, just to put people more at ease. I only spoke up if someone actually showed that they were interested in a piece of art. Even then, all I did was say "thank you for your interest. I really appreciate it," and I wait for them to decide to buy. I would then ASK if they would like me to sign their purchase. Not everyone wants you to sign everything for them, and don't take offense to this.

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Now it was nice for me to be asked to sign a sale, but that is not the point of a sale. Talk to people's kids, they love that you care enough to spend a moment making it a special day for their child. Try and remember how you felt about comics or going to a con when you were younger. I gave most the children who stopped by a free print. I would let them pick anything they wanted, and would then take pictures with them while they held the art up. Just small practices like this, that I try and do in everyday life, make a huge difference in how you are received in this industry by fans.

I sold over 100 prints in two days at $10 to $20 each. My table cost me $150, and the prints cost me nothing. As you can see, it was a very good weekend for me, and all I had to do was be myself and let the attendees know that they were important to me and that they were the reason I was there. Well, selling my art was great also, but my focus—and every creator's focus—should be to get as much content circulating as possible, and to make a positive impact on people. After all, those people have friends, and those friends have friends, etc. Whatever you do, don't seem desperate. Instead, let your passion show and the money will come your way.

I leave you with this simple question. Do you remember how you felt as just a fan of comics? Remember this and your success at shows will improve greatly.

For further discussion of this topic, please go to: www.selfpubmag.com/news/view/articles/presenting-yourself.htm

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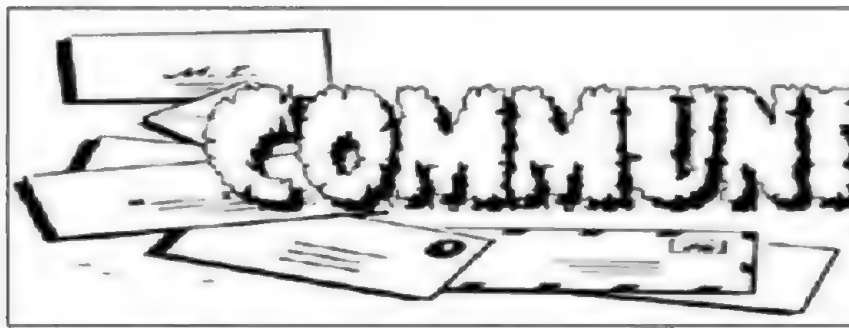

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I have, more than once recently, in our weekly newsletter...expressed my sadness and shock that so few people seem to actually want to discuss anything these days. This first letter is a reaction to that:

Huw Evans - eyecat@eyecat.com

Just a quick note to say that what you are trying to accomplish is very cool and commendable but, as you eluded to, this kind of thing is SO hard with everyone being pulled ten different ways nowadays.

I am also swamped, but I wanted to briefly acknowledge your efforts and tell you not to give up or get discouraged.

I just wanted you to know I appreciate anyone like you who is passionate about comics (or anything else good, I suppose). Don't let things get you down. Good luck!

Thanks Huw, the occasional letters I get like yours really do help keep me motivated. At this point, I've poured just about everything I have in me, into this current relaunch of SP! 4 issues into a monthly track, it's not the schedule that's dragging on me...it's that desire to see greater and greater results. But #58 hit the largest readership we've had yet, so I'm starting to think we're on the right track. I'll keep chugging away for now. As long as it seems like we're heading the right direction, I'm all in. –Ian

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Mark Glamack - littlunsall@yahoo.com

You might consider focusing in on the best of the best books that have great reviews supported by awards won. Keep that list constant with each of your issues as it builds from month to month. With hundreds of thousands of books published each year, your magazine could eliminate most of the noise out there and become a magazine known for quality.

Reviews and interviews can still be for books without awards but considered diamonds-in-the-rough.

Controversial subjects can also be of interest to readers.

Get the word out and build alliances with all self-publishers on the web. I would offer this for free in exchange for their mailing lists.

I talked to a few of the distributors out there about having them report their sales so that we could put up a monthly "top 20" or such list. All of them won't participate stating privacy agreements with the publishers. We may be able to start a voluntary reporting program with publishers to accomplish such a list...but I am going to shy away from only giving spotlight coverage to people who have already won awards...that's just not what SP! Is all about. I don't see my letting us go after controversy for controversy's sake, nor stray into a "sex sells" mindset (not that you suggested that, just saying). We are doing some behind-the-scenes talking about the SPA and bringing relevance and usefulness to it. Grabbing other people's mailing lists would probably end up with people hating SP! Spam. I think our best bet is to stay the course on creating a positive atmosphere that people want to be a part of. I really think at some point word of mouth will take over, and the readership results we all want to see, will happen.-Ian

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Christopher Allen Howard
- via Facebook

Looking through the latest SPM ... wanted to order from RedLeaf-Comics, but they wanted my address and phone number just for a digital. I'm not handing that over to them (phone & address), and I informed them so...thus they lost an order.

How do you advise young companies about old farts like myself that do not wish to give up all of my details for a digital order that would have been payed by paypal?

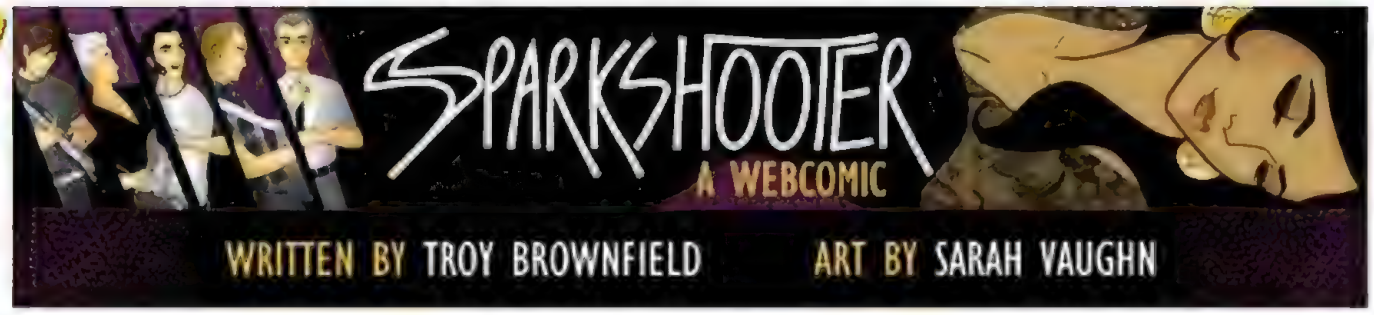
You're looking 100% a software choice there. I just went and looked, and they are using an open source php based shopping cart. I'm familiar with a number of these types of carts, but have not actually used this one. So I went to the software website to look over it's features, and this cart does include a Guest Checkout option...which means if it's configured for use, you would not need to have an account with the software to order things, and only have to enter a minimum amount of info, most likely configurable in the back end. Most carts do have this option these days for the very reason Christopher has illustrated. I like the idea and practice of relying on Paypal to provide the shipping address if needed on a book purchase. The portal software the SP! Site is based on, uses a cart that does not require a person to be logged in to the site to check out, and we used it when we did the sales for the special printing of SP! #58 last month. So, as for getting the word out there, I think that's the best I can do at the moment. It does bring up an idea I've mulled over a few times: Should SP! Magazine put together a "publisher's guide to doing things right" - a full book that delves into all these topics from multiple perspectives. I've wanted to do such a thing many times, but have never had the time, resources, and support needed to pull it off. Who knows. We'll toss that out there and see if anyone wants to talk about it.-Ian

It's Your Turn!

Want to add your voice and opinion to the chorus of what people are talking about in SP!? Send us a letter!
letters@dimestoreproductions.com

Have you gotten your name in the archives yet?

SNEAK PEEK!



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IT'S LIKE THIS.
WE'VE PLAYED SERIOUSLY SINCE HIGH SCHOOL, AND WE ALL WENT TO COLLEGE AROUND HERE.
SEAN AND ELIHU HAVE ACTUALLY KNOWN EACH OTHER SINCE THEY WERE LITTLE.
I MET 'EM IN JUNIOR HIGH.
WE HAD A HILARIOUSLY BAD BAND BACK THEN. WE WERE *TOXIC ZOMBIES* FOR A WEEK, THEN *DISASTER MONKEYS*. WE GOT BETTER.
WE STUCK WITH *BERGMAN'S BAD MOOD* FOR THE REST OF HIGH SCHOOL.
AS FAR AS PLAYING GOES, I WAS NEVER MUCH MORE THAN A DABBLER.
WHAT I DID BEST WAS PUT ON SHOWS.

Sp!
the Comic Book PRINTERS

SNEAK PEEK!

This Preview brought to you by:

Written by
Troy Brown-field

Drawn by
Sarah Vaughn

Check it out at:
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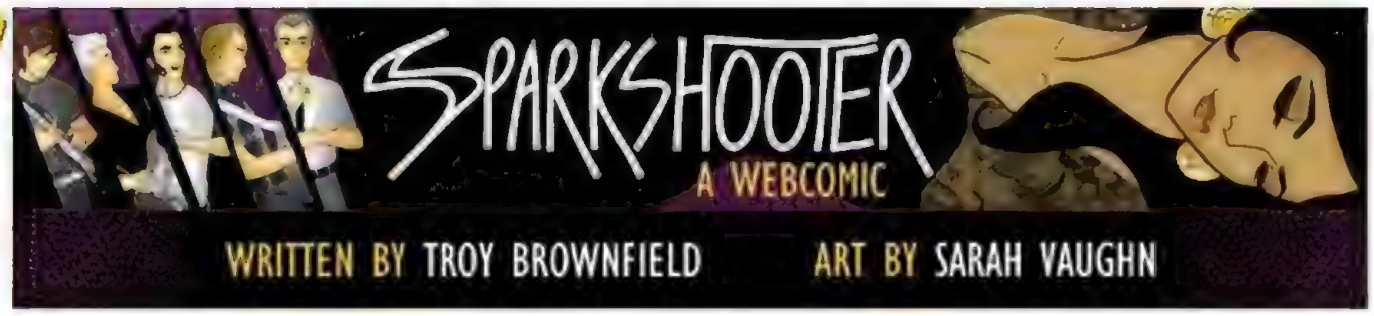

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THINGS TOOK A TURN OUR SOPHOMORE YEAR IN COLLEGE. WE WERE PLAYING AN ALL-AGES GIG.
ELIHU TALKED TO THE WRONG GIRL.
AND THE GIRL'S BOYFRIEND FUCKED WITH THE WRONG BAND.
DOWNSIDE: I BROKE FIVE BONES IN MY HAND.

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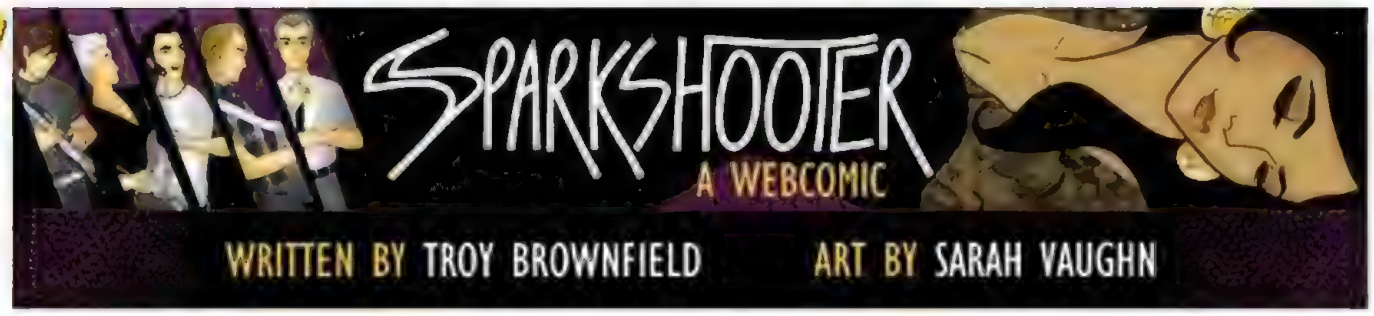

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I HAD A HUGE CAST FOREVER.
TO KEEP SHOWS WE'D BOOKED, WE PICKED UP LOWELL.
LOWELL WAS MEANT TO BE A TEMP, BUT HE IS UNDOUBTEDLY A GREAT BASSIST AND A SWEETHEART OF A GUY.
I'D ALREADY BEEN BOOKING SHOWS, BUT I DECIDED TO REFOCUS WHILE MY HAND HEALED.
I STARTED PUTTING TOGETHER PACKAGES, LINKING SHOWS, NETWORKING...
PRETTY SOON, I WAS MANAGING A FEW BANDS AND CIRCULATING GIGS.
ROCK AND ROLL
153 BALSON ST
10:00 PM
GIRLS GUARAN TEED
MAYBE
DID WE MENTION GIRLS?
BE THE

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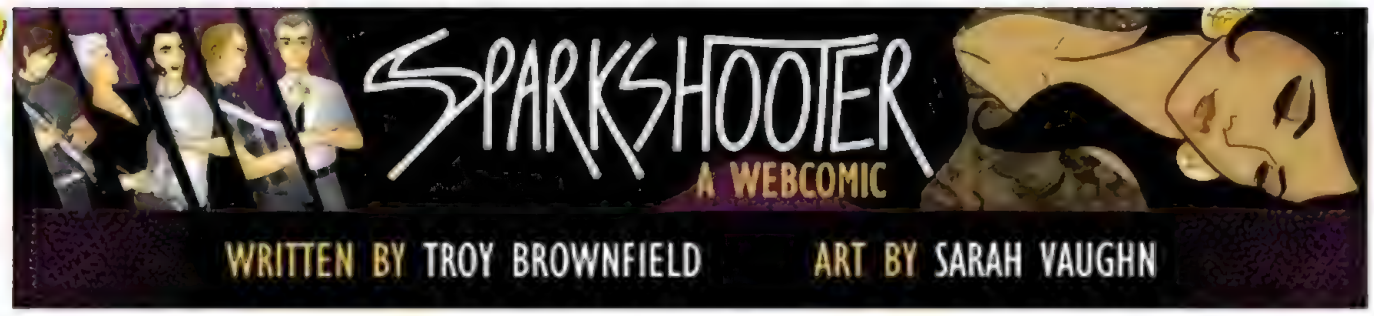

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DURING SENIOR YEAR, SEAN LEFT FOR A SEMESTER TO DO A PROGRAMMING INTERNSHIP.
THE BAND BROKE UP.
EARL, THE DRUMMER, GRADUATED EARLY AND TOOK A JOB IN ARKANSAS...
ELIHU AND LOWELL KEPT GIGGING AT COFFEE SHOPS AND STUFF.
WHEN SEAN CAME BACK, HE WANTED TO GET THE BAND BACK TOGETHER.
I GRABBED MICHAEL FROM ONE OF MY BANDS THAT HAD COLLAPSED. GREAT NAME: NO DISINTEGRATIONS.
THEN, RAY CAME ALONG.
ANYWAY, MORE ON THAT LATER. GOTTA TALK TO SONDRA. STICK AROUND, OKAY?

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GLYF

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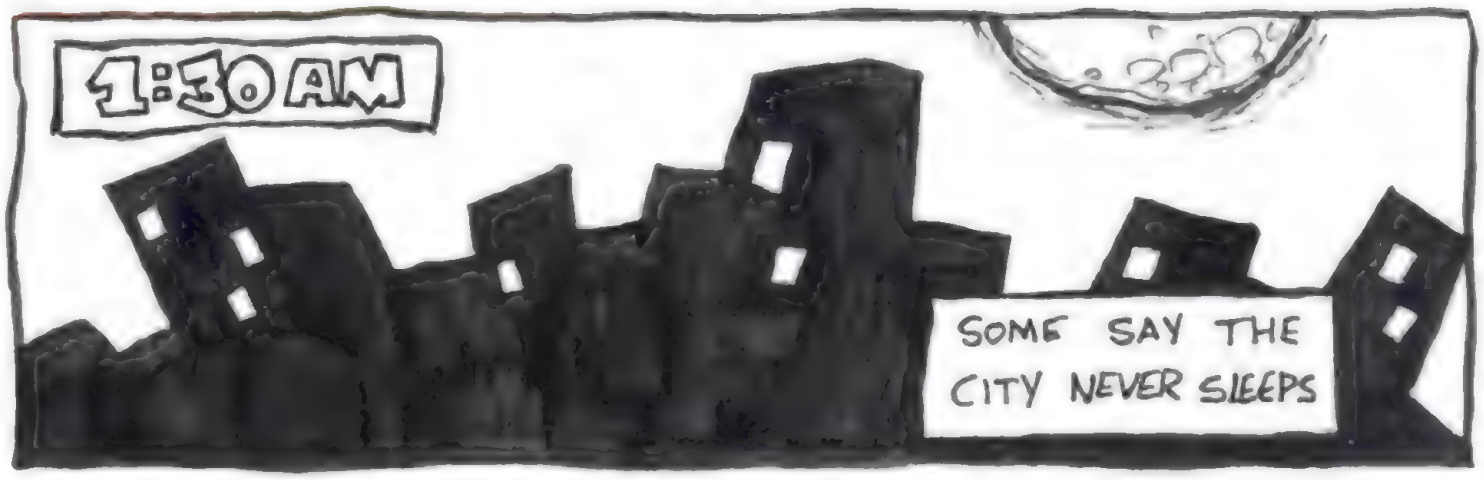

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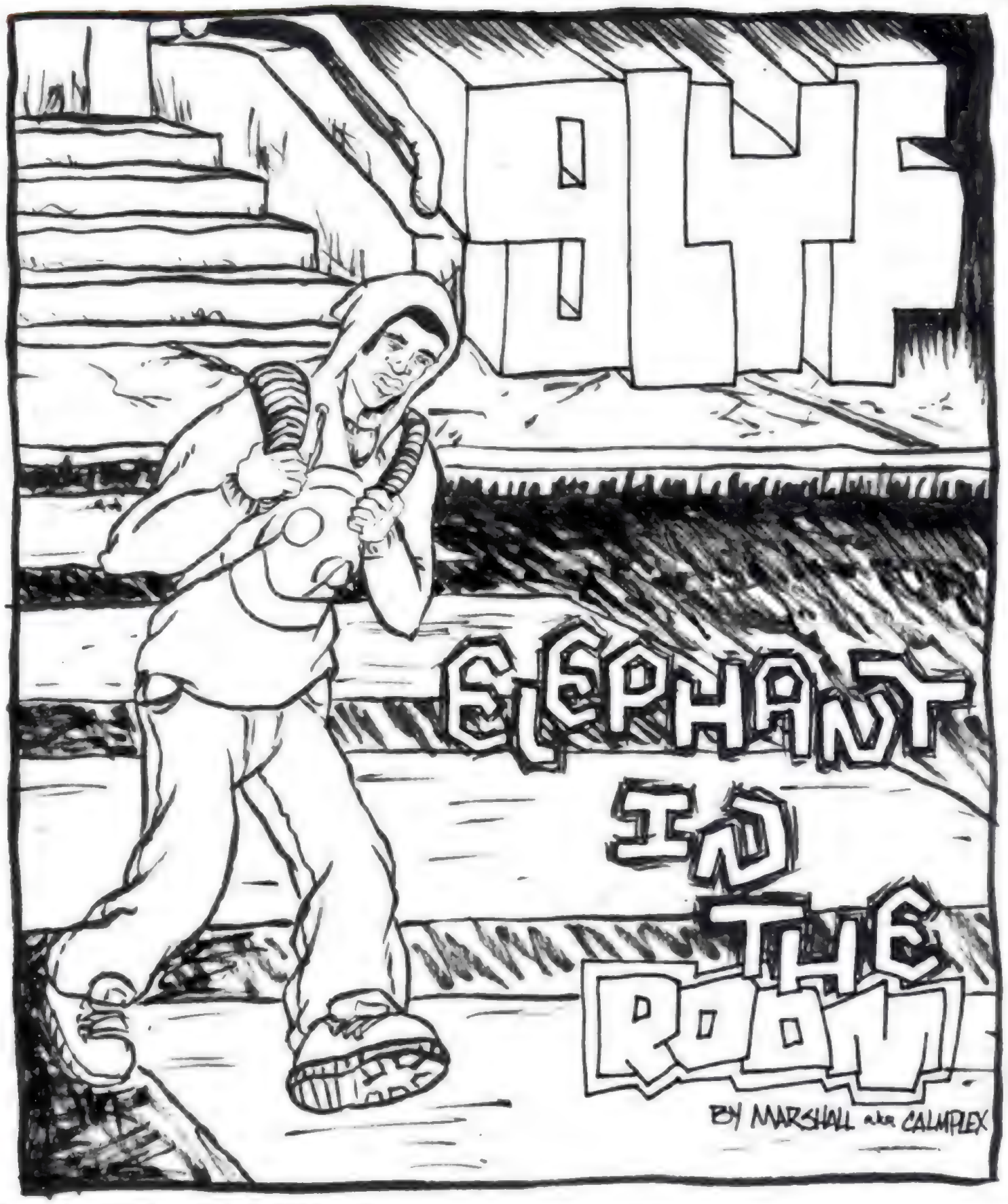

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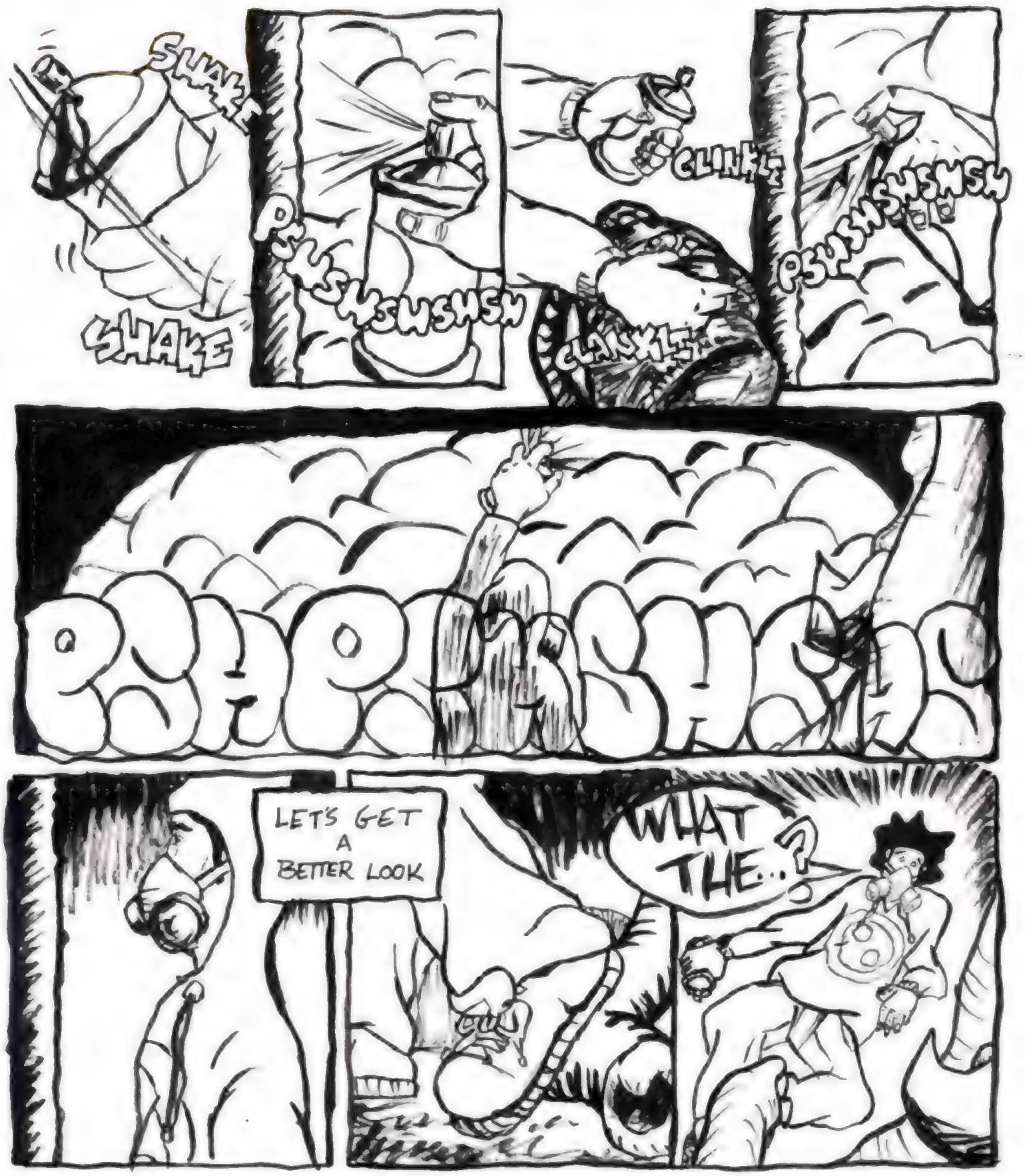
SHAKE
SHAKE
PSHSHSHSHSH
CLINK
CLINK
PSHSHSHSHSH
PSHPSHSHSHSH

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Veggie Dog Saturn!

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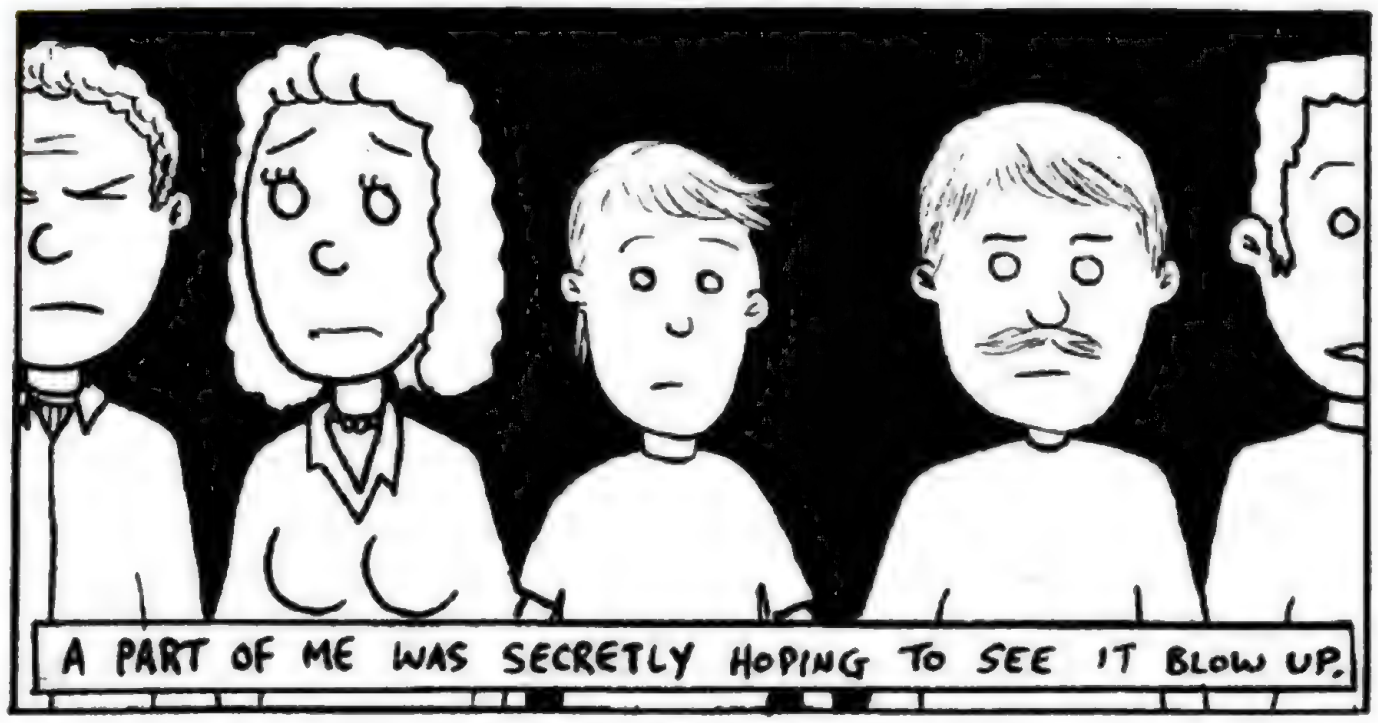

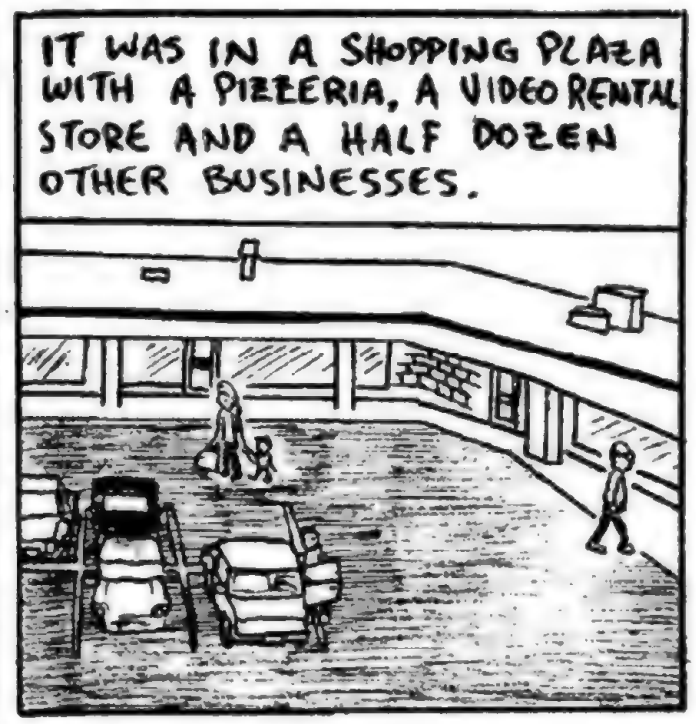

NORMALLY AT ONE THIRTY ON A FRIDAY AFTERNOON YOU WOULDN'T SEE ALL OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THOSE BUSINESSES HUDDLED OUT IN THE PARKING LOT...

BUT AN HOUR AGO SOMEONE HAD CALLED THE PIZZERIA AND IT WASN'T TO PLACE AN ORDER.
CASSANO'S... WAIT WHAT?
COLIN
CRUNCH CRUNCH CRUNCH

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Sneak Peek! Veggie Dog Saturn!

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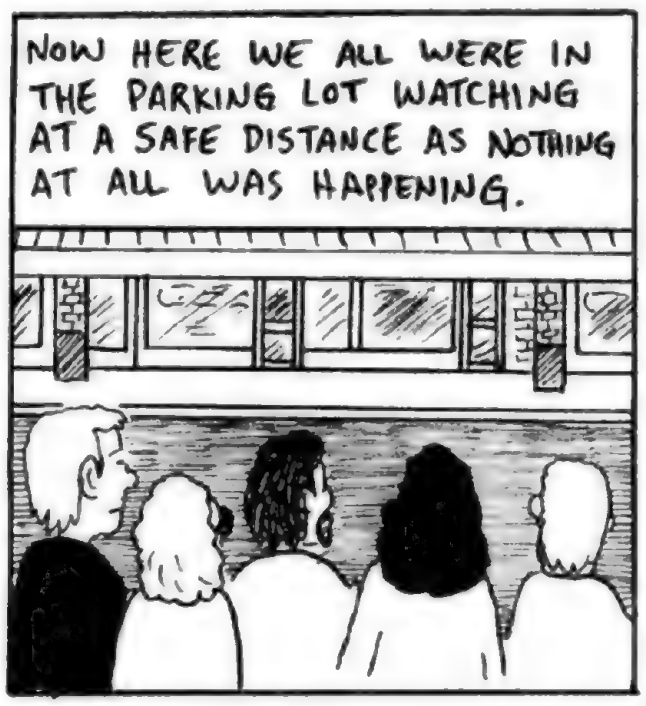
TAKING THE THREAT SERIOUSLY, THE MANAGER OF THE PIZZERIA CALLED THE COPS AND BEGAN ALERTING ALL OF THE OTHER BUSINESSES IN THE PLAZA.
EVERYONE OUT! THERE'S A BOMB!



WORD QUICKLY SPREAD THROUGH THE CROWD THAT THE POLICE WERE WAITING FOR THEIR BOMB GUY TO GET THERE.
I GUESS THE BOMB GUY'S ON HIS WAY.
BOMB GUY?

NOTHING MORE EXCITING THAN A DOWNED POWER LINE HAD HAPPENED HERE SINCE THE FLOOD OF 1913.
I HEARD THEY OPENED A NEW FRISCH'S.
DAYTON DAILY
MORE OF THE SAME
MMMM...

Sneak Peek! Veggie Dog Saturn!

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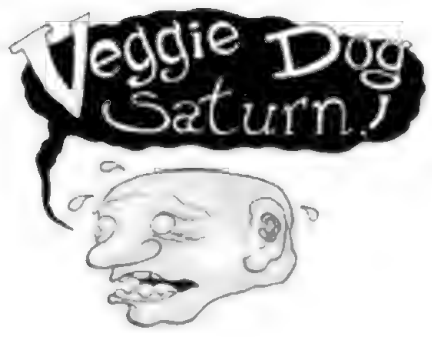

THIS WAS A REALLY BIG DEAL TO ME. I WAS SIXTEEN YEARS OLD AND THE ONLY TIME I'D BEEN OVER STATE LINES WAS WHEN OUR PARENTS TOOK US TO KENTUCKY OR TENNESSEE TO VISIT OUR GRANDPARENTS.
NOW BE CAREFUL IN CHICAGO HONEY...
I WILL MOM.

BUT THIS TIME IT WAS JUST ME, MY OLDER BROTHER AND TWO OF OUR FRIENDS GOING TO ONE OF THE BIGGEST CITIES IN THE COUNTRY FOR THE WEEKEND.
CALL ME WHEN YOU GET THERE SO I KNOW YOU BOYS ARE SAFE. NOW GIVE ME A GOODBYE HUG. I LOVE YOU.
ALRIGHT.. BYE MOM, I LOVE YOU TOO.

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SNEAK PEEK!

Veggie Dog Saturn!

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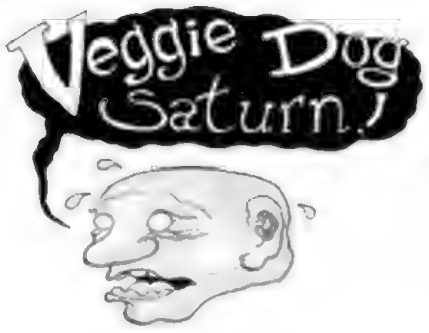

AND NOT JUST ANY WEEKEND. THIS WAS THE WEEKEND OF THE CHICAGO COMIC CON!
BUT I LOVE YOU MOST OF ALL COMIC BOOKS!
DOOM PATROL
MY BROTHER WAS IN HIS 20'S AND HAD ALREADY BEEN TO SOME BIGGER COMICS CONVENTIONS.
CAN I GO TO THE MID-OHIO SHOW WITH JOSEPH?
A-TEAM
NO HONEY... THAT'S TOO FAR AWAY FOR YOU TO GO WITHOUT ME THERE.
...BUT I'D ONLY EVER ATTENDED THE ONES HERE IN TOWN. AND TO CALL THOSE COMIC CONVENTIONS WOULD BE LIKE CALLING A SINGLE PIECE OF ICEBERG LETTUCE A SALAD.
REST URANT
OPEN TIL 10 PM
COMICS SH W
SUN 11-5
THESE WERE JUST A BUNCH OF LOCAL DEALERS BLOWING OUT THEIR OVERSTOCK AT 25¢ EA. IN A RENTED HALL AT THE HOLIDAY INN.
I GUESS I'LL BUY THIS ISSUE OF DARKHAWK WITH VENOM IN IT...
:SIGH:
THIS CONVENTION BLOWS...
25¢ EA.
IF WE WERE LUCKY THERE'D BE ONE PROFESSIONAL WRITER OR ARTIST THERE (USUALLY SOMEONE JUST STARTING OUT AT MARVEL OR DC)...
I MIGHT AS WELL HAVE THIS NOBODY SIGN MY ISSUE OF NAMOR.
JAE LEE
NAMOR #26
NOTHING LIKE CHICAGO'S COMIC CON WHERE GUESTS INCLUDED NEIL GAIMAN, TODD McFARLANE, JIM LEE, JOHN ROMITA JR., STAN LEE... THE LIST WAS UNBELIEVABLE!
LET'S SEE... I'LL MEET TODD McFARLANE FIRST... THEN I'LL GO SEE JIM LEE... THEN I'LL GET NEIL GAIMAN TO
GWAR

Sneak Peek! Veggie Dog Saturn!

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Veggie Dog Saturn!

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AND THE ONLY THING BETWEEN ME AND THEM WAS 300 MILES OF HIGHWAY...
I WISH THIS THING'D BLOW UP ALREADY...
...AND THIS BOMB THING.
WELL, WE MIGHT AS WELL JUST GO AHEAD AND LEAVE.
HUH?
IT'S ALREADY AFTER TWO AND I TOLD THE GUYS I'D PICK 'EM UP AT TWO THIRTY.
BUT MY BOOKS ARE STILL IN THERE... I CAN'T LEAVE UNTIL THEY LET US GO BACK IN!
YOU SEE, I'D SPENT ALL MORNING GATHERING BOOKS TO GET AUTOGRAPHED AT THE CONVENTION
... AND THEY WERE SITTING IN A STACK IN THE BACK ROOM OF OUR STORE.
WELL I'M LEAVING IN FIVE MINUTES. IF YOU WANT TO GRAB THEM THEN HURRY UP AND DO IT.
I GLANCED AT THE STOREFRONT HALF EXPECTING IT TO IGNITE ON CUE.
HMMM...
GO AHEAD...
THE COPS AREN'T LOOKING AND WE ALL KNOW THERE'S NOT REALLY ANY BOMB. IT WAS PROBABLY JUST SOME KIDS PRANK CALLING THE PLACE.
YEAH...

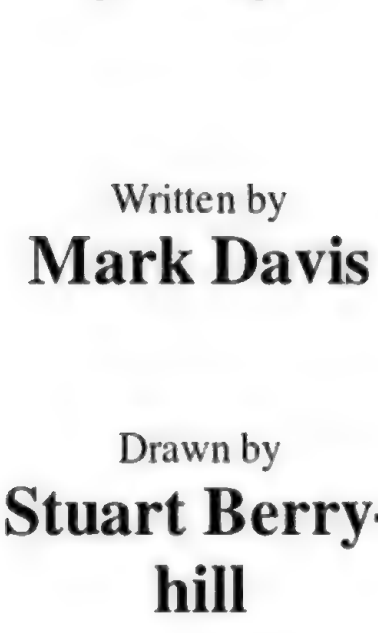
SURPRISING COMICS

This Preview brought to you by:

Written by
Mark Davis

Drawn by
Stuart Berry-hill

From an upcoming comic...
Check it out at:
http://www.surprisingcomics.com



THE BIG COVER-UP!

IS IT PARANOIA THAT DRIVES THE BIG FOOT TO DISPOSE OF THE BODIES OF MEMBERS OF IT'S OWN SPECIES? OR IS IT AN UNCANNY WISDOM NOT SEEN IN ANY OTHER CREATURE THAT WALKS UPON THE EARTH?

WRITTEN BY MARK F DAVIS | ART BY STUART BERRYHILL | EDITING BY JOHN MICHAEL HELMER | LETTERING BY SUPERGGRAPHICS

This Serialized story has been presented in parts over the course of the last 3 issues, this is the final installment!

It is our hope that you enjoy it and will further check out the author's work

Daniel Horn is writing articles and conducting thoughtful, in-depth interviews for SP!

Contact him at:
daniel.horn1128@gmail.com

THE LAST GREAT AMERICAN SALESMAN

a short story by

Daniel Nathan Horn

[And now….the exciting conclusion!]

John couldn't sleep. Carlo lay snoring on his air mattress, which was inflated in the middle of the floor. John turned in restive fits on the couch. He checked his cell phone. He had no service, and the battery was nearly dead. The cell towers ran on generators in intervals during power outages, but John doubted anyone was left to even turn those generators on.

It was two in the morning, and he was still alive. He was drunk and his head was spinning, but he was very much alive. He wondered when the end would come. He found himself dreading the anticipation of it more than the event itself. He wished he would die and just get it over with.

His introspection was interrupted, however, by a sound that seemed alien after so much silence. It was footsteps. Someone was running through the lot, toward the office. John lurched from the couch and knelt down to shake Carlo awake. Carlo woke mumbling groggy nonsense.

"Shh!" John warned, a finger to his lips. "Someone's coming."

"W-what? Who is it?"

The footsteps grew louder, closer, before finally terminating outside the door. There was an eerie moment of quiet. Then came three quick knocks on the door.

"Who's there?" John hollered through the door.

"My name's Darrell," the muffled answer came. "You got to help me. Please!"

John looked back at Carlo, who sat up on the mattress. Carlo shrugged. John turned back to the door.

"What do you want?"

"Th-the people... They broke into my home and took everything. I think they're coming this way. Please, let me in," Darrell pleaded.

John took a deep breath. He turned the handle and opened the door an inch to get a better look at the man outside. Darrell was a wiry young man. He looked like he was made of nothing but bone and sinew. He had a plaid shirt on, unbuttoned and hanging loosely over a white t-shirt. Darrell shifted anxiously on his feet. He kept looking back over his shoulder, as if the mob he had mentioned was right on his heels.

Carlo stood and pushed John aside, opening the door wide. "Listen, buddy, get the hell away from here. I don't owe you nothin'."

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"Come on, man," Darrell implored. "You got to help me! They're going to kill me!"

Carlo attempted to close the door, but Darrell thrust his foot in, impeding it.

"Please!"

"Son of a bitch!" Carlo shouted, trying to force the door shut.

Darrell began howling in pain as the door dug into the meat of his thigh. John jumped into the fray, grabbing hold of Darrell's leg to push it out of the way. Darrell thrashed liked a cat in a tub of water. He lunged into the door, forcing it open and knocking Carlo and John to the floor. Darrell himself crashed to the office's carpet, gasping for air.

"Please," he repeated between gasps. "Please."

"Goddammit," Carlo spat.

The three men all struggled to their feet. Carlo and John eyed Darrell cautiously. Darrell showed them empty hands.

"I don't want to fight," he assured them. "I just need your help."

"We don't have any help for you," Carlo insisted. "Now, kindly get the hell out of my office."

"I just need some water," Darrell continued. "And a place to hide 'til those people pass."

Carlo frowned. He did not speak at first. He simply glared at his intruder. At last he said, "Fine. Get yourself and drink and then get out."

"Thank you," Darrell exclaimed, looking up toward heaven. "Thank you."

"Yeah, yeah," Carlo grumbled.

As Carlo turned his back to the strange man, John saw Darrell reach back under his loose shirt tails, and then produce a five pound mallet, which had been tucked into his belt at the small of his back. John watched, helplessly, as in one swift, fierce motion Darrell raised the hammer and then immediately brought down on Carlo's skull. The strike sound like a melon splitting. Carlo dropped to the floor, spasming, blood welling from a large wound in the top of his head.

Darrell brandished the mallet, shouting, "Stay back! Where's the fuckin' money?"

John only stared blankly. Darrell, becoming frantic, roared again. "Where is it?"

John shook himself out of his stupor. "It's--it's in the closet. In the safe."

"You know the combo?" Darrell growled, pointing menacingly with the mallet.

"Y-yeah, it's twenty-eight, thirty-six, twenty-three."

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Darrell entered the closet and John could hear him fumbling with the combination dial in the dark. The sound of a lighter being flicked followed and then a soft glow came from the closet. Finally, Darrell emerged, still cramming bills into his pants pockets.

"Keys," he demanded.

"To what?"

"What about that Corvette out there?"

"Can you drive stick?"

"No, what else you got?"

"The lock box." John pointed. "Behind you."

Darrell opened the box on the wall, perusing the keys hung inside. He found a Lexus fob, and took it. Before dashing from the store he looked at John and offered what sounded like a sincere apology. "I'm sorry... for all of this."

Darrell ran to the lot, and John could hear a vehicle door open and close and the thrum of an engine starting. The sound of the accelerating engine quickly withdrew beyond hearing's reach. John slowly approached Carlo. He was still, his blood soaking into the carpet around his head. John bent down, putting his fingers under the notch in Carlo's jaw bone--Nothing. For Carlo, the end had come early; the agonizing wait, that anticipation, was over.

John rose and stood in contemplation for some time. He tried the office phone, though he knew it would not be operable. He dialed nine-one-one into the keypad several times with a despondent resolution. He then hung up the receiver and went to the open lock box on the wall from which Darrell had stolen a key. The Corvette key still hung from a center hook, like jewelry from Marie Antoinette's pale neck, and with the same seduction.

#

The Corvette roared to life. John slowly gassed it to the intersection, then reigned it in to a halt. A right turn would take him to the freeway or the interstate, east to inland's purported safety, a chance to escape the end for at least a few more hours. A left turn would take him--where? South? Magg Park? He had a new friend there, someone else who had been trapped here on the coast, abandoned; waiting for the sky to cave in his roof while he slept; being too young to have ever experienced the objectionable allure of strip clubs and breast implants. If anyone had been left here, John realized, his idling would have elicited a chorus of car horns behind him. He smiled, relishing the seclusion for the first and last time. He eased out the clutch, giving a little gas, and rotated the wheel to the left.

- THE END!

REVIEWS!

Policy: Dimestore will print reviews from just about any source, that are available at any source they care to list with us. It is our hope you will then get an idea if a book is worth pursuing, and indeed, go out of your way to get it. Our review system is managed online, so if you want anything reviewed, you will need to at least be able to send an e-mail...although our reviewers are authorized to collect things for review in person. Dimestore reviewers should have CARDS or copies of SP! to show that they are indeed who they say they are. Our reviewers are instructed to be reviewing for the READER, not the CREATOR...so we are sorry if a reviewer does not give a review that would boost your sales. Reviewers are ranked and given clout by reader votes online, and we won't print reviews for long from someone who people aren't finding their reviews useful. That said, we also instruct our reviewers to give constructive feedback and not be mean. Everyone starts somewhere, and SP! Is set up to be one of the first places a publisher may get a real review.

OUR REVIEWERS

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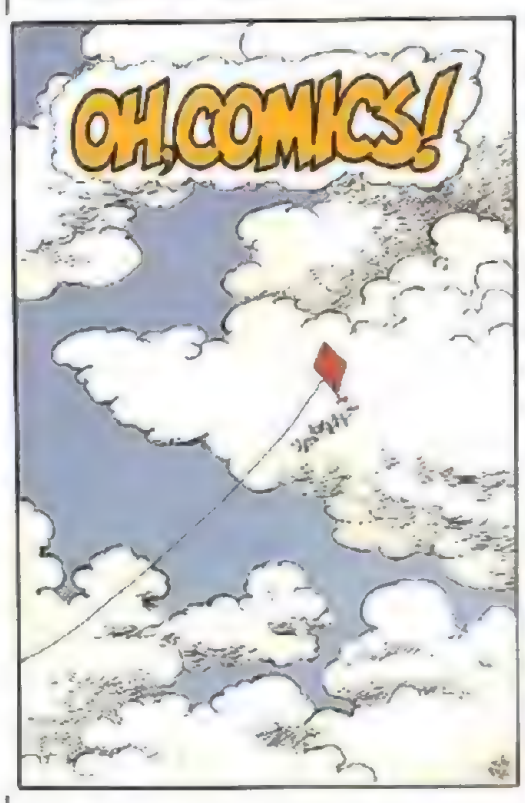
Back Porch Comics
OH, Comics #20



88pg Graphic Novel Anthology, B+W w/perfect bound color cover. First Printing, April 2012. Edited by Bob Corby, work by Bob, Bianca Alu-Marr, Steve Peters, Dexter Baxter, Brian Canini, Kel Crum, Pam Bliss, D. Skite, Canada Keck, Matt Levin, Steve Myers, Michael M. Carroll, Robert Gavila, Sue Olcott. Cover by Max Ink.

Order by mail for $7.50 postage paid from: Back Porch Comics/P.O. Box 20550/Columbus, OH 43220 or online at: www.backporchcomics.com

Review: Well, this book falls into that category of things I have no right to "review". I consider most of the contributors to this to be my friends for decades, and have contributed to this series in the past, myself. Bob Corby runs the only comic show I still attend, and, overall, if you don't know about and support *OH, Comics*, then you are really missing out on an important linchpin of the Indy scene.

So, let me just say this about the people that are in this issue that I have not sat in a bar and doodled jam comics with: there isn't a clunker strip in this book. Each artist has their own flavour and is a great talent. The stories follow the book's "Air" theme and turn in interesting and diverse visions. It's a great book in a long series of great books, and you should get a copy. -IS

Clay, Matthew
Epic Twist

16pg Full Size, full color comic. First printing, 2008. By Matthew Clay, Jon Douglas Dixon, Tara Bresch, and Chuck Roberts.

Comic book half of a comic/music CD combo package. Whole package $12.00 from: http://matthew-clay.mpahosting.com/index.php?option=com_rokquickcart&view=rokquickcart&Itemid=13

Review: Not sure if I got a copy of the CD part of this package, but I was able to listen to it at their website. It's a solid pop/rock style. Matthew has a good voice, gritty and hard, but not growling. I like the music a lot.

Now, as for the comic I am holding: It's a decent rise-to-fame, fall-from-grace, find salvation progression, drawn decently, but probably a bit too generic and fluffy to fly on its own. It also has some production errors that they should not have accepted: The pages are not aligned/trimmed properly. If you're paying for full color printing, insist on perfection. Also, I probably would have tied the CD more fully into the comic—it isn't actually mentioned directly in the comic; I discovered the combo set-up by visiting the website.

Anyway, despite flaws, I think the music probably makes it worth going ahead and checking this out further. Go to the website, listen to it yourself. You can buy individual tracks as well. As a comic book stand alone, it is not horrible, but neither does it really stand out. -IS

(Continued on page 49)

(Continued from page 48)

Comix-Mill
Studiobook—Tim fischer

36pg Alternative Size, B+W w/color cover. First printing, 2009. by Tim Fischer.

Track down at: http://www.comix-mill.com/

Review: I like art, and studies of the creative process always interest me, but sketchbooks seldom float my boat. They are eye candy and, almost always, a quick flip through and you're done; not worth the price of admission. Now, having said that, this particular sketchbook does have some art in it that shows enough of the process to impress me with the artist's skill. I'm not really a big fan of the extreme curves of the girls depicted, but I understand girl art sells.

All that said, the question before us is: is this publication worth buying? Well, maybe. It's got no price, and, at the website, the store section is currently disabled anyway. So, we have a book with some nice art in it, which I would say did its job of interesting me in the artist's work. So, best we can do is send you to the website and let you figure the rest out. -IS

Divine Authority Comics
Subject to Change #1

32pg. Full Size Comic, B+W w/color cover. First printing, July 2012. By Mark McCracken, and Nick Foster.

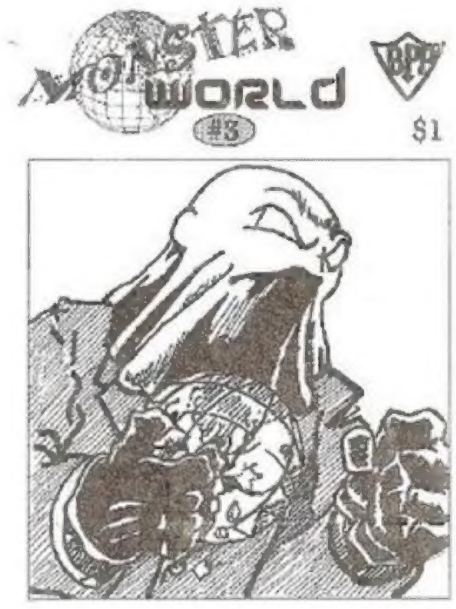
Not for younger readers. Track down at: www.divineauthoritycomics.net

Review: This book was surprising in a few respects, all of them good ways. We've been running ads for this comic in the past few issues of SP!, and not once did I really catch that this book would be about gay relationships. Yes, it is also about characters with superpowers , but they spend a lot of this issue in character development, and I found myself really enjoying the story flow. It goes places you don't expect and doesn't beat you over the head with any of it.

It's got a nice art style, nothing spectacular. I think what it is missing is shading… or color. It has none, and could really use it to add depth and variety to the pages. The perspectives and angles all work; they just lack the oomph that some texture would bring.

Other than that, the book is well packaged, has some good introductory/editorial pages, and the company does well promoting its other titles as tie-ins and continuations of their universe. So it's a really good comic here. I would recommend that you keep the little kids away from it, and its subject matter might turn off some, but a mature mind will find the characters interesting. I did. -IS

Gafford Productions
Monster World #3



8pg Minicomic, B+W. First printing, 2008. By Sam Gafford.

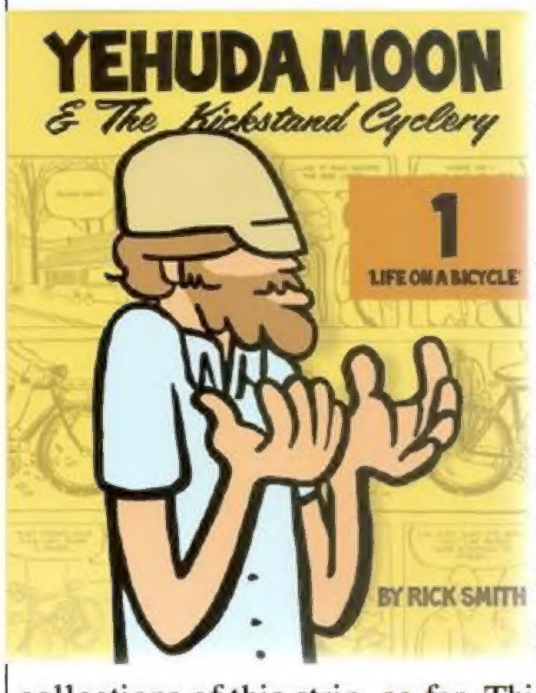
Send $1.00 to: Sam Gafford/ Box 806/Bristol, RI 02809.

Review: Sam's another one of those small press creators that are, simply, legendary pioneers. Without Sam, a lot of the things that went on in the pre-computer days of comics small press, would not have happened. So, that's one reason to get this minicomic, right off the bat.

Now for the downside. This story is severely cramped in this minicomic format. And I mean that, in a visual sense, word boxes crowd out artwork a lot here. I certainly understand the desire to make a minicomic format work. I did it myself for decades with my own comic. So we just need to keep that in mind. The story is Werewolves vs. Vampires, which is what it is. We're all seen multiple takes on it, with varying degrees of success and interest. What makes this mini WORK is the characters… who have their own backgrounds and personalities, and, in the course of the mini, depth.

I'll be honest. The comic's not going to set anyone's world on fire. But it is a decent effort by someone who deserves to have people looking at his work. So check it out, fans of minicomics. -IS

Kickstart Cyclery
Yehuda Moon #1



100pg. Graphic Novel, Full Color. Second printing, February 2012. By Rick Smith.

Available at: http://yehudamoon.com/shop/

Review: I'll tell you what: this is joining my list of newspaper-style comics that I really like. This is my first exposure to it, and I've obviously come in way late, but thankfully, I have been given all four huge collections of this strip, so far. This is the first one. You don't often see these types of collections in color, and that's a plus

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for this. It adds some great visual diversity to the strip. It's not going to be a quick read, should you take this on… It's got four strips per page, and lots and lots of pages. I couldn't read it straight through, but enjoyed a few pages at a stretch over a period of time. It's become a friend, and now that I'm done with the first volume, I'm looking forward to the next one. So, what you get here is well-drawn, well-written, well-packaged, and meaty. Not seeing a downside to report on it at all. Check it out! -IS

Main Enterprises
Main Enterprises Presents #6

36pg. Full Size, B+W w/ color cover. First printing, Winter 2012. Editor, Jim Main, work by Jeff Austin, Rock Baker, John Pierce, Robert J. Sodaro, Alex Lopez, mindy Lopkin, Emir Ribeiro, and Douglas Felix.

Order from: http://www.mainenterprises.ecrater.com/

Review: Main Enterprises is known for quality. Jim Main has been in the comics- and zine-making business longer than most of the people reading this review have been alive. So, just seeing a book by him tells you it's going to have some good stuff in it. And this certainly does. The opening strip is the only one I have any issue with; it seems over-reduced and the lettering is small. Especially, compared to the lettering in the rest of the strips. I struggled to read what is otherwise a very good story. And really, I think I like the story more than I disliked straining to read it, so, as things go, I'm picking a nit.

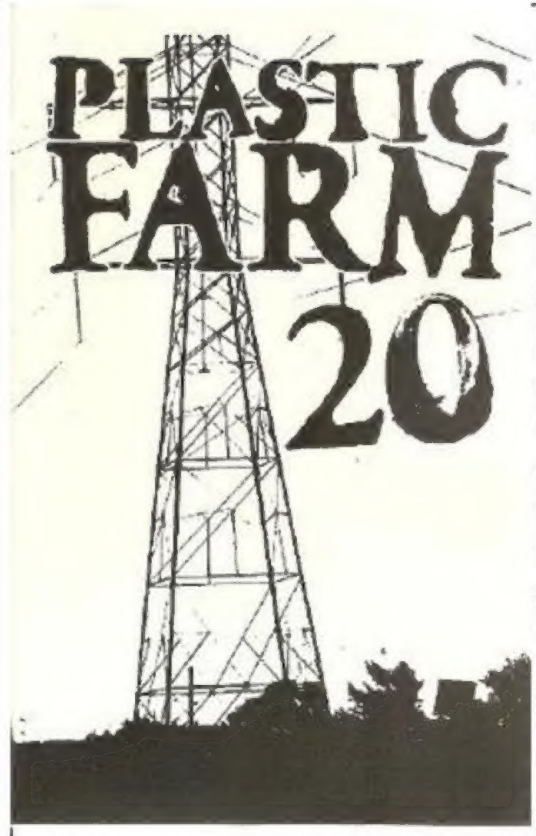
The artwork in all the strips is exceptionally good. The genres of the stories range from detective to space to superhero, yet all seem to fit together in the book. It's packaged well and has all the things you expect and want to see inside a good publication. I did notice that the cover has a very slight tilt in the printing/trim, which seems to be a recurring problem with POD-printed books, Comixpress in this case. Overall though, a really good effort here, and worth checking out. Everyone with work in this book deserves to have more and more readers' eyes on their stuff. And it is a statement on the state of the comics industry that Main Enterprises is not being carried in all comic stores. It should be. -IS

Plastic Farm Press
Plastic Farm #20

36pg Digest, B+W. First printing, 2011. By Rafer Roberts, Mal Jones, and Matt Dembicki.

Available at: http://www.plasticfarm.com/storesingles.html

Review: It's been a long time since I saw an issue of *Plastic Farm*, but I have fond memories of the full-size comic issues I reviewed, back in the day. This artwork is still produced for full size, and thus a bit shrunk for digest printing, but it still carries all the oomph of the original artwork. Rafer works with a couple of very solid artists this edition, each bringing their own flavour to the stories they are involved in. Visually speaking, it's really nice. Then you delve into the reality of this series. I'll admit, not having seen a dozen or so parts of this, I may have missed some of the nuances. But, things are told in a way that draws you right in and swirls your brain into the freaked-out realities found inside.



So, if you can't tell, I really enjoyed this issue, and recommend all of Rafer's work. He's a solid talent, who deserves more attention, both for his longevity, and for hisdedication to this cool title. -IS

Porterhoused Comics
Blank & Stick—Journal of Dumb

64 pg B+W Magazine-sized. First printing. By James and Elaina Porter.

Order from: porterhouse138@yahoo.com

Review: I tried to give this a shot. I really did. I mean, we all like a good dumb joke now and then. But, this is not really funny. In fact, as it is, it's downright yucky. We have cartoons, smudged on purpose to make them look like they were done by younger people then did them (at least that is the impression), then a page of that is followed by a prose story, written as if the author was a little kid, but telling stories about things that are… off-putting, at the very least. I don't really want to repeat them. Then there are partially-blank pages, apparently encouraging you to add your own dumb stories and cartoons, so half the book is actually empty.

There is no price, no contact info in the book (I got a business card with their e-mail when I got the book, so you can contact them, if my description of this book for some reason interests you. I mean, it takes all kinds, and it's none of my business if you do like this kind of half-perverted toilet humor.), and well, having read this, I feel dumber. Maybe it did its job? Save your brain cells, I say. -IS

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Like our reviews?
Tell the publishers you saw it in SP!

(Continued from page 50)

Stamina Studios
Comic-Strip Movies #4

50¢
COMIC-STRIP MOVIES #4
STAMINA STUDIOS PRESENTS:
CAN A MAN STILL LOVE A WIFE WHO IS TRYING TO KILL HIM?
BURY ME NOT
BY LUISA FELIX
SATIRE; FILM-NOIR
THUMPHREY BOGUS, CANDY BLONDELL

12pg Minicomic, B+W. First printing, 2009. By Luisa Felix.

Track down this mini at: felixhoboken@aol.com

Review: Luisa's art style is cartoony, but to be able to pull off the caricatures she does, you know she has studied art and has practiced her skill. It's a good level of simplicity and artistic eye that brings this otherwise word-heavy minicomic to a different level. The story is a spoof on old movies, and it is delightfully demented. When I say this mini is word-heavy, I'm not saying that the words are not good ones… I'm basically saying, I wish that there were more pages with more art, telling this exact same amount of story.

As a minicomic, this is a great example of what this format can do that other formats cannot. It's a drive-by shooting of coolness. Track it down. -IS

Underground Video Network
Killer in the House

8pg Minicomic, 2-color printing. First printing, 2012. By Gary Collins, Kenny Long, Tim Valerio, and Richard Katterjohn

Track down at: http://undergroundvideonetwork.com/contacts.htm

Review: This is an odd little book. It's got a very normal horror premise, it's got very small pictures that are blurry—that, I guess, are supposed to progress the story, it's got red blotches all over the pages to represent blood spatter, and… that's it. It's over. Doesn't really go anywhere. Nothing particularly gory, doesn't do much for me.

With no price, I think they just give these away at shows to remind people to come visit their website. Looking around there, they've got some interesting stuff. So, I guess in that sense, the mini works! Go see? -IS

Visionary Comics
Digital Visions #2

33 pg webcomic, Full colour. Dated August 2008. Available for free at www.visionarycomics.com.

Review: Although *Digital Visions* is an anthology, its closest analogy in mainstream comics would be the old DC title *Showcase*, where new series were debuted. Three of the stories in *Digital Visions* are actually the first chapters of ongoing series. *Gangland Avalon* is the strongest, and features a well-drawn introduction to a world where magic is real, but controlled by the mafia (it also has a well-done Batman homage). *Gathering of Nations* is another dark fantasy tale, this time about magic being used to stop the colonization of the Americas. The story was hard to follow, but may read better in collected form, as we only get a fragment here. *Headlocked is* by far the strangest of the batch, as it is a tribute to the old WWF wrestler the Ultimate Warrior, who is rechristened Ultimate Soldier, and who may be a government operative, as well as a wrestler. Again, we only get a fragment of the story here. "An Eden in Hell" is billed as a self-contained short story, but reads as a condensed graphic novel preview. Although the series all have possibilities, it is hard to tell here. The publisher should have stolen a page from the original *Showcase,* and devoted the whole issue to a single series. -CD

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